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# The Market Masquerade: A Rising Tide Sinks Leaky Boats

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# The Market Masquerade: A Rising Tide Sinks Leaky Boats

**by**

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# Abstract

## The Market Masquerade: A Rising Tide Sinks Leaky Boats

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Because school systems are rarely evaluated as part of the larger ecology of a city, we know little about how schools contribute to or detract from inclusive growth and justice oriented equity in the larger community. In fact, few studies seek to explain the broader socio-political context, or the economic imperatives that imbue both the education sector's and a city's 'redevelopment.' This study addresses this critical gap by examining what happens when district-level school reform is linked to the larger project of economic development within a city. More specifically, it explores how the politics of race and power, and a subscription to traditional economic theories at the federal, state, and local level, shaped the post-Katrina rebuilding of New Orleans and the attendant sweeping school reform.

Drawing on critical policy analysis and theory from human, community, and sustainable development, this study uses a new multi-disciplinary framework for policymakers and education leaders to evaluate the relationship between school choice reform and urban 'revitalization.' The framework centers around four domains: mobility

and opportunity, well-being, agency, and trust, all of which must work in concert to reduce systemic inequality and empower communities. This study investigates the market-based redesign of New Orleans at the city and school level, using a qualitative case study design that includes document and policy analysis, twelve semi-structured and five informal interviews, and observations.

Findings show that the policies driving the city's redevelopment stripped power from the black community to build a new system that consolidated control and tended to conform to white, neoliberal models of economic success. Further, the long-term equity tradeoffs of redevelopment were not taken into account during the policy creation and initial implementation process. This study contributes to several fields of education research. It broadens the scope of school choice theory, making a case for looking beyond the individual consumer to the broader context and community impact. It also marries critical theory to the principles of sustainable, human, and community development, pushing policymakers and advocates center reforms around justice-oriented equity. Finally, it answers growing calls to situate education policy analysis within larger socio-cultural and political contexts.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s there has been a marked shift towards privatization and market ideology in every major public sector in the U.S. (Sclar, 2001). Many scholars refer to this "social paradigm" (Lipman, 2011) as neoliberalism[1], which is premised on the notion that increased privatization, coupled with decreased state intervention and funding of public services, best advances human well-being (Harvey, 2005). Further, these market-based reforms draw on economic theory that stipulates autonomy, choice, incentives, and competition yield more effective and efficient means of delivering services (Chubb & Moe, 1990). In education, school choice via charter schools, vouchers, and "portfolio districts" (Bulkley, Henig, & Levin, 2010; Hill, Campbell, & Gross, 2013) echoes this trend (e.g., Apple, 2006; Ball 2007; Burch, 2009). Though charter schools and vouchers are fairly well known reforms, the portfolio model is, too, gaining popularity. A portfolio model is a citywide school system that, in theory, is designed to offer high-quality, diverse, autonomous public schools—typically a mixture of public and charter schools, in which parents choose a school for their children, instead of being assigned one.

These reforms predominately occur in low-income communities of color, sold as a strategy to improve or replace "failing" public schools. Several large, urban school districts, such as New Orleans, Detroit, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Newark already have expansive choice models, in which schools have greater autonomy, and families more schooling options (Levin, 2012). These reforms operate in parallel, and on occasion are undertaken in conjunction with, urban development (also referred to as urban revitalization or renewal, gentrification, and economic development, among other popular phrases). Yet, schools, and particularly school systems, are rarely considered, measured, or evaluated as part of the larger ecology of a city.

[1] From this point forward, market-based reforms and neoliberalism will be used interchangeably.

Most often schools are viewed as economic drivers—producers feeding future economic markets—successful when preparing students to participate in their economic futures (Labaree, 1997). On occasion, schools are celebrated both for their academic success and the role they play in a particular community (e.g. Green, 2015, 2018; Horsford & Heilig, 2014; Warren, 2005). In even fewer cases, the functioning and operation of a school system is considered as part and parcel of a city's economic development (neither considered in the planning stages, nor in the evaluation of progress made in a city). Perhaps the rarest evaluation of school systems and the policy and practical decisions made in reforming them looks at how market-based policies targeted at both education reform and urban development contribute to or detracts from inclusive growth within a city, i.e., the impact on equity for communities within a city.

In particular, few studies examine high density choice systems in this way. They are especially suited to this kind of study because they explicitly purport to break the link between geography and life outcomes, and thereby further the goal of equity. Such market-driven policies are meant to disrupt existing school systems (Betts & Loveless, 2005; Levin, 2012), but they can also disrupt communities, social networks, and trust. Whereas neighborhood schools have historically been a centerpiece of the community (Milner & Howard, 2004; Taylor Jr. et al., 2013), in choice systems the location of a school may have no relationship to the surrounding community. Charter systems are also often run and staffed by community outsiders (e.g., Kretchmar, et al., 2014; Scott, 2013), a non-local presence that may marginalize local priorities, particularly of the low-income and minority families being served by the schools, and change social capital and networks that were previously a boon to those residents. The dearth of literature on the relationship between high-density choice systems, currently America's most popular reform strategy, and urban development, indicates that policymakers and advocates may

be enacting reforms that improve schooling on finite accountability-based measures without considering the ways in which these reforms can amplify existing inequality and serve to further cement a social order privileging those already in power.

Accordingly, only a handful of studies expressly focus on the relationship between community, equitable development, and school choice. While there is a growing body of literature exploring the intersection between gentrification and/or urban development and schools, much of it focuses on the dynamics within school buildings (i.e. how parent gentrifiers use power and capital to commandeer the direction of a school (e.g. Freidus, 2016, Posey-Maddox, 2014), with just a few scholars exploring the relationship between the expansion of school choice and economic development/gentrification more broadly (Cucchiara,2013; Lipman, 2011; Pearman & Swain, 2018). Even fewer of these studies look at the relationship between district-wide systemic reform and the attendant policy environment, and urban development. To understand how market-oriented, simultaneous city and/or state driven school reform and economic development play out at the community level, an equitable development or inclusive growth framework is needed, yet lacking in the literature.

This study, then, contributes to a small but emergent strand of literature in education examining the relationship between schools and economic development, with a particular focus on how policies impact urban communities, and in turn, the political, social, and economic well-being of the city in the long-term. To explore the ways in which choice-based, district-wide reforms enhance or detract equity among communities, I draw from the fields of human, community, and sustainable development to develop an equity and justice oriented framework for understanding the relationship between school choice reform and urban development, while using critical theory as a lens to focus my analysis. While these theories around development

were constructed to respond to the predominately economics-based practices of development, the current educational marketplace serves as a microcosm, possessing parallel economically driven goals and measures for success. Another parallel between typical approaches to development and market-based reform in education is both are generally comprised of strategies hoisted upon struggling communities, without first assessing their needs and vulnerabilities, strengths and desires (Buras, 2015; Lipman, 2011; Mueller & Dooling, 2011, Zernike, 2016). In sum, these frameworks, all of which are concerned with creating conditions that allow people and communities to flourish, work in concert to promote planning, policy, action, and research that prioritize equity, ultimately in the pursuit of expanded access to a fulfilling life, not just an economically better one.

New Orleans serves as the ideal site for this research, as it is currently the only all-choice, almost all-charter school system in the United States. And while New Orleans may be an extreme case, it is representative of the increasingly common practice of restructuring of the school system as part of a concerted urban renewal effort. Further, New Orleans is clearest example neoliberal reform taken full-scale, providing the opportunity to examine the equity implications of this approach to policy making across sectors.

## Context and Rationale

While education has only more recently seen the influence of policies informed by neoclassical economic theory, it has long been the philosophy driving national and international economic development strategies and the evaluation of growth. For example, the International Economic Development Council (n.d.), the largest non-profit organization of economic developers with over 4500 members, “promotes economic well-being and quality of life for communities, by creating, retaining and expanding jobs that facilitate growth, enhance wealth

and provide a stable tax base" (para 1). The persistence and predominance of this neoliberal approach resulted in the movement for sustainable development, which arose to combat the orthodoxy of growth-at-all-costs, specifically raising concerns over the long-term environmental impact – but also questioning whether growth alone moved society towards equity. Soon after, the human development approach came to the fore (Jolly, 2003) calling, but with much greater intensity, for a more holistic understanding of, plan for, and measurement of equity. Researchers, theorists, and policymakers became concerned that the singular focus on Gross National Product (GNP), Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and median income as the measures of success, obfuscated the ultimate goals of development, increasing quality of life (or real choices) and equity[2] for people (Sen, 1999), and did not account for the potentially devastating by-product of environmental degradation, nor human rights, freedoms, and agency (Fukuda-Parr, 2003). The focus, then, was on utility and demonstrable economic gains in the immediate future with little-to-no concern, or planning, for the longer term (i.e. unsustainable).

This push has been effective. Many international development organizations, like the International Development Association, an arm of the World Bank, have shifted to a more holistic, inclusive, equity centered approach to development (for an example see the *World Bank's Fund for the Poorest* (2016) report). The other major critique leveled was that evaluators considered economic development as both the means and the ends, whereas, in fact, material assets (when equally distributed) only provides the foundation for pursuing equity (Deneulin, & Shahani, 2010; ul Haq, 1995, 2003). Instead, subscribers to the human development approach argue, it is all the other conditions and policies within a community or society that allow individuals to pursue the life they value. Finally, though the ability to take part in the life of the

[2] Equity, for this study, is defined as the ability to convert resources (material, intellectual, social etc.) into quality of life (real choices) and unimpeded opportunity to become full participants in the economy, society, and polity

community is an underpinning of sustainable and human development, neither are explicit about how to grow and sustain community. The longstanding field of community development, and its more recent cousin, sustainable communities, however, offer insight into the key ingredients needed to grow and sustain communities that promote equity, and argue effectively that without these communities, individuals cannot thrive (Bridger & Luloff, 1999; Larsen et al., 2015; Mueller & Dooling, 2011; Wilkinson, 1979).

In education, especially in the age of accountability and neoliberal ideology (Apple 2006; Lipman, 2011), schools' success (e.g., test scores and graduation rates) is measured much in the same way as economic success (e.g., GDP, employment rates, income, etc.). There is a predominant narrative across the country positing that academic achievement is the key to a better life, and closing the opportunity gap is within schools' purview. The underlying philosophy, similar to pinning equity to economic growth, is that improved academic outcomes via testing and graduation rates will naturally create more equity. The assumption being, that with the pressure of accountability on schools, currently underserved children will learn more and gain the needed credentials for better employment opportunities, while the added market structure (i.e. choice) works in tandem to improve school quality as a function of the competition to stay open and receive resources. Our current systems, then, inordinately focus on increases in test scores, graduation rates, and other minimal amounts of quantifiable data that look at achievement on the aggregate, at the school, district, city, county and state level, and create a means for navigating the marketplace. We know from research in the development fields that a neoclassical approach to development, which focuses on singular numerical measures is misguided, confuses the means and ends of achieving equity, and does not work in an intentional way to achieve equity for individuals and communities. Following the same logic, education

policies that focus exclusively on economic returns to schooling (e.g., quantitative indicators) and market principles (e.g., choice and efficiency) are unlikely serve the goal of equity. Current research has shown, in fact, that the wealth gap between educated black and white American actually grows with educational attainment (Hamilton, 2019), highlighting the need not only to focus on the roots of structural inequality but to consider components of equity not encompassed in an economic perspective.

Further, the rapid growth of charters—privately run, yet publicly funded schools and the embodiment of market principles in education—is directly challenging the institution of public schooling. The push for charters stems from a crisis of confidence in public education—spurned by political posturing that for decades the institution has failed to keep America competitive, failed to close achievement gaps, and is culpable for maintaining "savage inequalities" (Kozol, 1991) among poor, minority, urban youth. Rooted in the ideologies of disruption, decentralization, privatization, and competition, charters—coupled with high-stakes reform mandates on school closure and reconstitution—have the potential to exacerbate instability in both the relatively stable traditional district model (a virtue of its monopolistic nature and place as an arm of the government) and the new choice-based ones. This is the case because competition is predicated on the opening and closing of schools based on academic performance and attendance, and because of a lack of systemic oversight and unity, the byproduct of prioritizing decentralization and autonomy. While instability and disruption may be considered necessary conditions for improvement and innovation in a market setting, a wealth of literature indicates that instability, in general, can be harmful to children's and communities' development and well-being (Sandstrom & Huerta, 2013; Adams & Dubary, 2014), and in the school arena

specifically, can hinder achievement and success (e.g., Bryk & Schnieder, 2002; Herbers, Reynolds, & Chen, 2013; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013).

## The Theory of School Choice

Though students in America have always had some choice in schooling, through housing decisions, private schools, magnets, and district transfer policies, Milton Friedman's (1962) seminal work regarding vouchers shifted the conversation. He argued government should cover the expenses of education, but parents should be able to choose any school, public or private, for their children. His was the first proposal for a publicly financed but privately run system of education. Despite Friedman's recommendations, the choice movement, was slow to pick up speed in the 1960s and 1970s, but by the 1980s states began to experiment more widely with vouchers, charters, and magnets.

While there are many reasons for the expansion of school choice, the modern choice movement largely rests in the principles of market theory. Those who subscribe to the theory see public schools as a monopoly, offering students and parents (i.e., consumers) no options (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Henig, 1995). It is, therefore, a closed marketplace where competition cannot provide the best outcomes for all parties. Supporters of school choice proffer that in a market- or choice-based model schools are forced to compete for students, and in turn, are motivated to provide services that meet the needs and desires of students and parents (Hoxby, 2003). At the same time, this model theoretically empowers parents and students, the consumers, by affording them the opportunity to shop around and choose a best-fit school. This creates a system where inefficient schools, or "underperforming" schools, bend to market pressure and either improve or close.

## Charter Schools and Portfolio Districts

Choice in urban, public school districts is particularly focused on improving options for "underserved" communities—championing the idea of increasing the achievement of minority and low SES students by providing more and better options (Berends, 2015). The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2015) advertises this point front and center in its annual report, highlighting that the in districts with the highest share of charter schools more than 80% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch, and 86% are minorities. The last decade has seen a dramatic increase in the opening of charter schools, currently the most popular manifestation of choice, and the percent of students attending charter schools. Today, all but seven states have charter laws, and of the almost 2,268,000 students enrolled in charters, 56% live in cities (NCES, 2014). Though much of the discourse surrounding charter schools focuses on free market ideology, the charter movement originated from a different philosophy. Rooted in democracy, equity, innovation, and civic and community engagement, charters were originally conceptualized as a means to provide educators, citizens, and community members the right to petition the government for a redress of grievances—meaning those who "imagined a better way to educate children could request a charter to run a school" (Sizer & Wood, 2008, p. 8). Though community-based charters do exist today, the proliferation of Education Management (for-profit) and Charter Management (non-profit) Organizations (EMOs and CMOs), and no-excuses charters across urban America largely result from reformers who subscribe to the market-ideology underlying choice and subvert the importance of community school relationships.

Similar to the rapid expansion of charter schools the last decade, the popularity of portfolio districts has grown immensely as well. In 2008, only four districts were counted as using this model (Hill et al., 2013), but by 2016 more than 35 cities have implemented the

portfolio strategy (Center for Reinventing Public Education [CRPE], 2016). Conceived in the same market-oriented vein as charters, portfolio districts favor decentralized governance and operations, autonomy, and choice (Bulkley et al., 2012, Levin, 2012). Critical of the one-size-fits-all neighborhood school, arguing that these schools cannot and do not meet the diverse needs of students, proponents of portfolio districts instead believe districts should offer menu of schooling options for children. In this model, district leaders, or the mayor, serve as a portfolio manager who has the freedom and responsibility to close unproductive schools, and the facility and flexibility to replicate high-performing schools—both of which are measured by yearly academic performance among students (Hill et. al, 2013). Though portfolio districts do not either exclusively require public or charter schools, the underlying principles promote a charter like approach, emphasizing autonomy, accountability, choice and options, and pupil-based-funding (Hill et al., 2013). A final guiding principle of portfolio districts is extensive public engagement, but only in the sense that when a district has decided to convert to the portfolio model the following practices are to be put in place: a strong communication plan to convey information regarding policies, a means to make public criteria and a schedule for school closings and openings, create a forum for parents to express concerns and receive responses, and form partnerships or coalitions with other community stakeholders (Hill et al., 2013). So, while the model does seemingly encourage transparency—it remains very much unclear the extent to which families and community members are engaged, empowered, and able to exercise agency both within the existing system and in bringing this approach to fruition.

## Purpose Statement and Research Questions

Because portfolio districts and charter schools—highly dependent on test scores for validation of success—are proliferating in urban spaces across the country and serving some of

our most vulnerable populations, there is a need to examine whether such reforms, particularly when tied to urban renewal, *strive toward equity now, and in the future, for students, parents, and community*. School systems that rely on market principles, or the invisible hand, run the risk of replicating existing inequity (Kelly, 2007). If they do not intentionally create systems and structures that guide participants towards equity and inclusion, the interconnected network of community, schools, and city can become increasingly vulnerable. This study draws on critical race theory (e.g. Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Delgado & Stefanic, 2017; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993) sustainability, human and community development theory, and political economy in urban education (Rury & Mirel, 1997; Scott & Holme, 2016) to create a new framework for evaluating the sustainability of choice-heavy school systems, illuminating the relationships between market-based school reforms, community, and urban economic development in settings beset with racialized power dynamics. Despite the growth in charter school research over the past 20 years (Berends, 2015), few studies have examined education markets from a systems perspective, i.e., how the whole school system functions and its impact on communities, specifically communities of color, and the city in which they are nested. In particular, there is a lack of understanding about how the system-wide functioning of an all-choice system measures up against non-market centric indicators of equity and how that relates to the experiences of the students and families directly involved.

This study addresses this critical gap by examining what happens when district-level school reform is linked to the larger project of economic development within a city. More specifically, I explored how the politics of race and power and a subscription to traditional economic theories at the federal, state, and local level shaped the post-Katrina rebuilding of New

Orleans and the attendant sweeping school reform. To better understand these relationships, I asked:

1. *How does the introduction of a charter- or choice-centric school system fit into the larger project of the "redevelopment" of a city?*
2. *In what ways does the interaction of city and school reform (dis)empower different populations?*
3. *What are various stakeholders' perceptions of mobility and opportunity; trust; agency; and well-being, and how do those perceptions speak to the school system's ability to increase equity?*

## Theoretical Framework

The fields of human (e.g., Deneulin & Shahani, 2010; Sen, 1999; ul Haq, 2003), community (e.g., Bridger & Luloff, 1999; Saegert, 2012; Wilkinson, 1979), and sustainable (e.g., Campbell, 2013; Oden, 2009) developed alternative frameworks for measuring equity and inclusive growth as a response to the neoclassical economic measured so commonly used around the world. These frameworks highlight both the interconnected nature of policy and humanity, and that economic success is not the driver of equity, but one of many means to that end. These frames then, are useful in examining an intentionally created educational marketplace that is tied to city-wide economic development. The neoliberal theory underlying these reforms parallels goals and measures for success found in traditional economic development (i.e. numerical achievement via testing is given the same weight as GDP growth). A further parallel between typical approaches to economic development and market-based reforms in education is that frequently these reforms are enacted upon vulnerable communities, without consultation or inclusion, assuming better economic conditions will yield equity outcomes despite a failure to assess community needs and vulnerabilities, strengths and desires (Buras, 2015; Dixson; Lipman, 2011; Mueller & Dooling, 2011, Zernike, 2016).

Table 1: Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts

| *Term/Concept* | *Meaning* |
|---|---|
| Equity | *Equity* is the ability and freedom to convert resources (material, intellectual, social, cultural, etc.) into real choices (attain quality of life) and the unimpeded opportunity to become full participants in the economy, society, and polity |
| Development | *Development* is an increase in the overall standard of living (quality of life) for individuals within a community. The purpose of development is to enhance people's range of choices, in the present and in the future, in all areas of their life: economic, social, political and cultural. |
| Sustainable Development | *Sustainable Development* is a framework for initiating development while managing of trade-off's between economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity for present and future generations, with the goal of positive growth in all three categories. |
| Capability Approach | The *capability approach* refocuses the measure or evaluation of equity on the actual life choices of individuals (viewing people as their own agents), as opposed to a measurement of their material reality. This approach defines equity as the freedom (i.e. capacity) to pursue the life one has reason to value, emphasizing access to opportunity instead equality of achievement. (agent formulate and pursue reasoned objectives) |
| Human Development | *Human Development, or the Human Development Approach (HDA)* is a people focused approach to development that places people, instead of the economy, at the center, outlining a framework for assessing economic and social progress. It proposes an alternate paradigm where growth, whether economic, political, or cultural, is viewed or analyzed through its contribution to the widening of people's choices and enrichment of their lives. Ends of development are not economic, those rather become part of the means for bettering human lives. |
| Community | *Community*, often rooted in a place or a space, is a group of interconnected people who share either, or all of these characteristics: a common history; a set of values, concerns, and/or goals; a sense of belonging; a culture; and trust. |
| Community Development | *Community development* involves intentional attempts by residents or community members (when not neighborhood bound) and professionals to strengthen community ties and improve the physical, economic and social conditions of the community, in service of helping individuals and households realize their goals and aspirations. |

Table 1, cont.

| | |
|---|---|
| Justice Oriented Equitable Development | A framework for developing and evaluating policies, institutions, and systems that focus on equity now and in the future, by targeting outcomes that fall into four domains: mobility and opportunity; agency, well-being; and trust. |

Combining theory from these fields and filtering them through a critical race theory lens, I developed a new multi-disciplinary framework for policymakers and education leaders to understand and evaluate the relationship between school choice reform and urban 'revitalization.' The framework centers around four domains: mobility and opportunity, well-being, agency, and trust, all of which must work in concert to reduce and attack the roots of systemic inequality. Accordingly, this framework is used to examine how the market-based economic development and school system reforms in New Orleans enhance or detract from equity and justice.

## Research Design

The massive changes in policy in New Orleans following Katrina serve as an excellent case (Eisenhardt, 1989) to explore relationship between politics, policy, and market-based reforms and their impact on equity. To conduct this critical policy analysis, I employed document and policy analysis, conducted formal semi-structured stakeholder interviews (n=12), and informal interviews (n=5), observed community and school board meetings (n=7), and collected descriptive demographic data. I performed content and rhetorical analysis policy documents, speeches, and laws. Interviews were coded using a hybrid method (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

## Research Site

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the state legislature and state board of education, seized on the opportunity wrought by disaster to reshape the educational landscape of

New Orleans. At the time, the district was comprised almost entirely of traditional public schools Today, New Orleans Public Schools is the only all charter district in the country. Focusing on New Orleans provides a lens into an almost fully market-based school system that has completely destabilized the previous institution (Harris, 2015), destabilized the black middle class, and was, in large part, foisted upon the people of the city in their absence and without their input (Dixson, Buras, & Jeffers, 2015). Further, the system is the first example of a conceivably viable alternative to the hundred-plus year existence of traditional public school districts. Concurrent to the school reforms, the city embarked on a massive rebuilding plan guided by traditional principles of economic development and the push to grow cities by attracting a "creative class" (Florida, 2002). The new system of "world class schools" (Bring New Orleans Back Education Committee, 2006), was part of this larger project. New Orleans serves as the ideal site for this research, as it is currently the only all-choice, almost all-charter school system in the United States. New Orleans is also unique in that the restructuring of the school system was part of a concerted urban renewal effort at the city and state level, following the catastrophic destruction of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Though all charter schools are now back under the control of the local school board, in the wake of Katrina the created the Recovery School district and took over all but 12 schools. Over the next few years, all of those schools were converted to charters. Despite being returned to local control, individual charter schools, or the full network of charter schools within a city, are frequently considered their own local education agency, wherein some are run by nationally based charter management organizations (CMOs), others are run by New Orleans based CMOs, and a fair number are independent, or lone, charter schools. All have privately appointed boards. This multi-layered, partially democratic governance structure may complicate the ability to

cultivate transparent, efficient, and responsive institutions, and therefore, influence relationship with families, and the larger community. In addition, the philosophy and approach of different charter schools, plays a role in their mission, discipline structure, culture, and pedagogical approach, both creating the market of options, but also influencing the interaction with students, their parents, the community.

New Orleans was purposefully chosen as the site for this study for two reasons. First, it is the closest example of a true market in education that currently exists, providing a unique case "best epitomizing competitive models for education" (Lubienski et al., 2009, p. 615). At the same time, it is a model that is being replicated across the country (Lake & Hill, 2009). Second, Harris (2015) has shown that on standard measures of achievement, mobility and opportunity are increasing in New Orleans, but whether the system that generates these outcome is also promoting a more equitable society for students, families, and communities has yet to be considered through a justice-oriented equitable development lens.

## Significance

This study, then, contributes to a small but emergent strand of literature in education examining the relationship between schools and economic development, with a particular focus on how policies impact urban communities, and in turn, the political, social, and economic well-being of the city in the long-term. In particular, my work examines cross-sector issues in urban education. Because school systems are rarely evaluated as part of the larger ecology of a city, we know little about how schools contribute to or detract from inclusive growth in the larger community. In fact, few studies seek to explain the broader socio-political context, or the economic imperatives that imbue both the education sector's and a city's 'redevelopment.' This

study addresses this critical gap by examining what happens when district-level school reform is linked to the larger project of economic development within a city.

This study makes unique contributions to several fields of education research. It broadens the scope of school choice theory, making a case for looking beyond the individual consumer to the broader context and community impact. This work also brings the principles of sustainable, human, and community development to the study of school reform, suggesting policymakers and advocates center reforms around equity and justice. Bridging education research and sustainability theory also allows for a focus on the role of government institutions to structure the market, make it equitable, and contribute to truly sustainable growth, an under-theorized area. Finally, it answers growing calls to better situate education policy analysis within larger socio-cultural and political contexts.

With no consensus in the research on school choice, and a lack of emphasis on families' and communities experiences in a revamped school system, the current body of literature is often lacking specific strategies focused on improvement—an issue of special importance in cities like New Orleans that have experienced much trauma resulting from severe displacement and disruption. At a time when the public nature of charters are being called into question, cities across the country may be adopting policies and a system that are dynamic but also unstable. To ensure that such experiments in governance do not take with them the power, strength, and glue of local communities, this research yields concrete recommendations on how to sustainably develop the system so that it is situated towards equity

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## Part I: Sustainable, Human, and Community Development

*"If we believe that we, as Americans, are bound together by a common concern for each other, then an urgent national priority is upon us. We must begin to end the disgrace of this other America. And this is one of the great tasks of leadership for us, as individuals and citizens this year. But even if we act to erase material poverty, there is another greater task, it is to confront the poverty of satisfaction - purpose and dignity - that afflicts us all. Too much and for too long, we seemed to have surrendered personal excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things. Our Gross National Product, now, is over $800 billion dollars a year, but that Gross National Product - if we judge the United States of America by that - that Gross National Product counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for the people who break them. It counts the destruction of the redwood and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm and counts nuclear warheads and armored cars for the police to fight the riots in our cities. It counts Whitman's rifle and Speck's knife, and the television programs which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children. Yet the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile. And it can tell us everything about America except why we are proud that we are Americans."* (Robert F. Kennedy, 1968)

In March of 1968, Robert Kennedy delivered the remarks above as part of a longer address to a crowd at the University of Kansas. Earlier in the speech he urged Americans to do better and end "the disgrace of the other America," noting the country had failed to live up to its promise of equity and opportunity—especially for its minority populations—despite continued economic growth. Building off this notion, he warned of the laser focus on economic success as the signal of progress, highlighting all the accompanying negative byproducts, and all the positive human experiences that, as a consequence, are ignored or brushed aside. Though not officially developed for another 20 years, Kennedy highlights some the main tenets of sustainable development: economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity—urging Americans to think about the interconnectedness of people and their impact on the world around

them. Finally, he reminds his audience that a fulfilled life is one that includes dignity, community, health, education, participation, and joy, and that every human being has a right to such a life, the founding principles of human and community development.

Kennedy's insistence on a holistic accounting of Americans' lives has since been developed and translated into theories in a number of fields. One of those fields, sustainable development, has been gaining momentum over the past three decades. Sustainable development is principally concerned with maintaining an acceptable balance between environmental degradation, equity, and the growth of economic markets. Market ideology is growing in a number of sectors throughout the United States, including education, begging researchers, policy makers, and practitioners to also think about sustainable development in this new arena.

The chapter that follows is organized in the following way. Part I introduces the theories of sustainable, human and community development, discusses how they speak to and inform one another, and addresses what they offer in terms of assessing an economically driven approach to development. Part II reviews the relevant literature regarding market based reforms in education, specifically school choice via portfolio models and charter schools, and highlights why a new approach that focuses on equitable and social sustainable development is necessary. Finally, Part III introduces a new framework for evaluating market-based education systems and demonstrating the utility of evaluating market models in education with these frameworks at the fore.

**Sustainable Development**

Sustainable development, first introduced to a worldwide audience in 1987 from the World Commission on Environment and Development, is "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"

(Brundtland, 1987). In creating this definition, the commission was responding to the fear that the earth and environment were being used in the name of economic progress to such an extent that future generations may not have the ability to enjoy the benefits of said economic growth. Further, the commission recognized that if social equity is sidelined or traded-off in the quest for development that, too, would hinder future generations from pursuing an equal or better life than the present, i.e. stall social progress. Since then, the field has grown immensely, and scholars from multiple disciplines draw from fuzzy and increasingly complex understandings of this original definition, which has resulted in the lack of a comprehensive theoretical framework (Jabareen, 2006). However, there are a few conceptual underpinnings that span across the literature and are particularly relevant to understanding school systems.

Sustainable development manages trade-offs between the economy, the environment, and equity (also referred to as social progress)—the three E's or the "triple bottom line," with the goal of a net positive in all three categories (Oden, 2009, Campbell, 2013). In theory, all three pillars are vital to

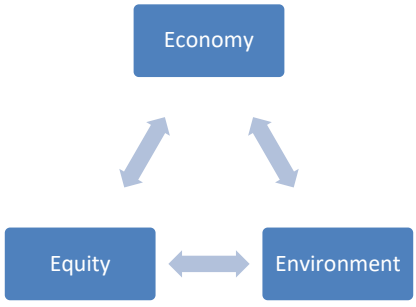


*Figure 1*: The 3 E's of Sustainable Development

growth that is durable (Pearce, 1988). Policymakers and researchers have primarily focused on economic growth, commonly assessed via GDP, GNP, and other basic statistics such as employment and median income, placing a secondary emphasis on rules and regulations that

preserve as much of the environment as possible without slowing economic progress. Equity, the hardest to define and measure, has been an afterthought. Historically, measures of equity have not been integrated into most scholarship and practice in sustainable development (Murphy, 2012; Oden, 2009; Thin, 2002; Wheeler, 2012), instead it has been taken for granted that an increase in GNP or income will result in greater equality. In this way, economic development has been conflated as both the means and ends of measuring equity.

Recently, however, scholars have increasingly argued that equity must be front and center for any true form of sustainability to take hold (Campbell, 2013; Oden, 2009), including greater attention focused on social solidarity and democratic decision making (Oden, 2009; Carter & Reardon, 2014) to ensure that those seeking social justice are not sidelined while those who hold power are privileged (Campbell, 2013). A focus on equity, then, is central to sustainability, not only because inclusionary policies are important for the maintenance of democracy, but because research increasingly shows that vast inequity destabilizes markets and reduces capacity for growth and/or vibrancy (OECD, 2014; Bernstein, 2013; Stiglitz, 2012; Summers & Ball, 2015).

**Human Development and the Capability Approach**

The narrow vision of equity among sustainable development planners, policymakers, and scholars quickly yielded a new theoretical approach to development. Pioneered by Mahbub ul Haq, the human development paradigm, which is now frequently referred to as sustainable human development, gained international standing in 1990 with the publishing of the first Human Development Report through the United Nations (a new report has been published every subsequent year since that time). The framework both evolved from, and was a reaction to, the shortcomings of sustainable development, as well as the predominant use of solely economic and utility driven models for measuring equity (ul Haq, 2003). It emerged from concerns that equity

was being overlooked and insufficiently evaluated. More specifically, critics charged that by focusing on a single, traditional measure of economic progress, these models failed to adequately account for and emphasize equity and quality of life within the human experience (Sen, 1999; ul Haq, 1995, 2003). At its core, human development promotes human dignity and an expansion of freedoms, as its basic objectives are to expand "people's freedoms to live long, healthy and creative lives; to advance other goals they have reason to value; and to engage actively in shaping development equitably and sustainably on a shared planet" (UNDP, 2011, p. 14). It does this by proffering a pluralist, systemic accounting of how humans in different societies live, assessing basic standards like the state of education, healthcare, and poverty, and more complex standards like access to political participation, cultural freedom, and the ability to walk outside free of being shamed. Further, human development recognizes that human lives are "battered and diminished in different kinds of ways" and that "deprivations of very different kinds" must be acknowledged and addressed without seeking a single solution (i.e. increased income) to do so (Sen, 1999, pp.17-23). It is fitting, then, that human development analyzes policy and human reality via multiple fields, such as law, economics, sociology, political science, philosophy and education. So, while the human development framework does not discount the need for economic growth, it does regard it only as one, though be it an essential one, of many means to achieve particular equity-focused ends: enlarging human choices and enriching lives and building and supporting the use of capabilities for current and future generations (Mahub al Haq, 2003).

Mahbub ul Haq along with Amartya Sen, helped conceive of the human development paradigm, which is philosophically founded in Sen's "capability approach" (Sen, 1980, 1999, 2005). In the capability approach, the purpose of development is to enhance people's capabilities

(promote their well-being), in the present and in the future, in all areas of their life—economic, social, political, and cultural (Deneulin, & Shahani, 2009), mirroring the goal of human development and in a sense, sustainable development. Capabilities, according to Sen (1999), are most akin to the notion of opportunity, the freedom one has to pursue a variety of functionings (what people are able to do and be) they value, regardless of what the person ultimately achieves. In other words, the concept of capabilities is a means to capture or measure equity by how many potentially alternate life paths a person can choose from. For example, a poverty stricken child in rural Africa with no school or drinkable water within 30 miles, has a very different set of capabilities available to them than a wealthy child attending a nearby private school in a despotic nation. Their attendant needs, in terms of achieving a state of well-being, differ—suggesting policy responses to their states of being should differ as well. It is important to note here that though the word choice of Sen, capability, connotes an innate ability, in this framework it does not in any way describe the potential within humans for achievement, but rather conditions and policies that aid individuals in, or prevent individuals from, pursuing their potential (i.e., the condition of poverty can severely limit one's capabilities).

If capabilities are the array of possibilities available to a person, agency is the freedom to choose which capabilities to pursue. Agency is the other central component of this approach, as focusing on well-being alone leaves humans as patients, instead of active agents of change who shape their own destiny and can be judged in terms of their own values and objectives (Sen, 1999). Further, this means that development processes should not only seek to improve individuals' capabilities, but also to foster participation, public debate, and democratic engagement (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009).

## Community Development

The recently renewed focus on social equity in sustainable development and increased attention given to human development theory and the capability approach, has begun to shift the conversation away from economic growth as the end all, be all of development. Apart from noting that participating in the community is a key indicator/outcome of successful human development, these frameworks say very little about community—an inescapable and vital part of our reality – and its role in successful, sustainable, equitable development. In this section, I will briefly establish why community matters and then go on to discuss the relationship between community development, economic growth, social well-being, empowerment, and sustainability.

**Community matters.** Firstly, community is the place where individuals (inherently social creatures) interact with society, and it is those interactions that allow the self to develop (Larson et al, 2015; Wilkinson, 1979, 1991). Humans, inevitably, are part of communities (whether active or not) through their residential location, interest groups, and institutional and social ties even if they are not actively involved. Not only is the local community key, as Sampson (2013) notes, "as a site for the realization of common values in support of social goods, including public safety, norms of civility and mutual trust, efficacious voluntary associations, and collective socialization of the young" (p. 310), but also vital to individual and social well-being (Larson et al, 2015, Lyon & Driskell, 2012). As, community allows individuals to purposefully participate in the development of social structures, build competencies through interactions with diverse people, and develop and experience collective action, open communication, equity, acceptance, and communal relationships—all which contribute to self-actualization and well-being (Bridger & Luloff, 1999; Larson et al, 2015, Wilkinson, 1991).

Finally, it is the social unit with the most potential for meaningful change and improvement (Lyon & Driskell, 2012).

**Community development.** Communities can also be harnessed to address social, economic, and political problems that serve as barriers to well-being and self-actualization, such as inadequate education, crime, suicide, violence, social exclusion, inadequate healthcare, lack affordable housing, and unemployment. This is the core purpose of community development efforts. The range of definitions for community development are beyond the scope of this section, but most generally community development involves intentional attempts by residents or community members (when not neighborhood bound) and professionals or organizations to strengthen community ties and improve the physical, economic, and social conditions of the community (Lyon & Driskell, 2012; Wilkinson 1979), in service of helping individuals and households realize their goals and aspirations (DeFilippis & Saegert, 2013). Community development efforts are almost exclusively aimed at struggling neighborhoods, typically defined as low-income, and frequently comprised of people of color. This is the case largely because economic and racial inequality manifest geographically in the United States, leading to racial segregation and concentrations of poverty (Massey & Denton, 1993; Sampson, 2012; Squires and Kubrin, 2005). Communities, particularly urban communities, in the context of this framework, are crucial in that they are the focus of an array of different development efforts (community developers, economic developers, school reformers, federal programs) that are rarely done in conjunction with one another.

While these improvement campaigns can be locally led, community efforts, it is often the case that there is a power imbalance between the drivers of development (typically community outsiders), and the community itself, leading to policy solutions that may be undesirable, or even

detrimental (e.g., DeFilippis & Saegert, 2013; Mueller & Dooling, 2011). Yet, when organized and empowered, community can serve as a buffer or resistance to outside institutions, policymakers, foundations, and others from making unwanted changes—often in the name of development, revitalization, or education reform (Patterson & Silverman, 2014)—and instead build solutions around community cultivated goals and assets (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Organized and empowered communities are those that have built civic capacity (Shinn, 1999; Saegert 2012), the ability of a community to effectively leverage available resources to identify and achieve shared and individual goals (Saegart, 2012). Civic capacity relies on the existence of social capital, forged in the relationships (i.e., networks) that are the basis of community, but also on other forms of capital such as political, intellectual, cultural, human, and economic (Bourdieu, 1985; Coleman, 1988; Gruber, 1994; Yosso, 2006), and on institutionalized relationships that breed a sustained commitment to solving problems (Stone, 2011). By drawing on and accessing these varied resources (or capital) in pursuit of their own agenda, communities exercise civic capacity by influencing decisions made by public and private actors, influencing the content of the larger social agenda, and effectively implementing policies and decisions to improve the community (Saegart, 2012). In short, civic capacity is a community-oriented phrase for collective agency. Just as agency is essential in the work of human development, it is so for community development as well, fostering sustainability by ensuring communities are shaping the policies and conditions that affect them most—rather than further isolating them from political and economic decision making.

**Sustainable communities.** Finally, community development that yields capacity, efficacy and empowerment, and real improvements, should not be fleeting. For communities to enjoy the fruits of their labor and expanded well-being/quality of life, there must also be a focus

on sustainability. There is a modest body of research that explores the notion of sustainable community development (also referred to as sustainable communities). While much of this work focuses more explicitly on the relationship between community and environmental degradation, there are some key definitions that are relevant to connections being made in this paper between sustainable development, human development, and community development. Zachary (1995) outlines a strong base definition:

> [It is] [t]he ability of a community to utilize its natural, human, and technological resources to ensure that all members of present and future generations can attain a high degree of health and well-being, economic security, and a say in shaping their future while maintaining the integrity of the ecological systems on which all life and production depends. (p. 8)

Bridger & Luloff (1999) add that sustainable communities are committed to social justice, in that they focus on providing for the needs of all residents and equality of access, placing equal emphasis on collective and individual well-being. Finally, "sustainable communities strive to create an empowered citizenry that can effectively participate in the decision-making process" (Young, 1990, p. 251), echoing the central theme of agency and empowerment in human development and the capability approach.

In sum, these frameworks, all of which are concerned with creating conditions that allow people and communities to thrive, can work in concert to promote planning, policy, action, and research that prioritize equity, ultimately in the pursuit of expanded access to a fulfilling life, not just an economically better one. Recurrent themes in each of these three development models, prompts a combined approach that focuses on mobility and opportunity, agency, well-being, and trust in governance that enables positive growth in all three areas inter and intra-generationally.

While these theories around development were constructed to respond to the predominately economics-based practices of development, the current educational marketplace serves as microcosm, possessing parallel economically driven goals and measures for success. The review of literature below outlines how the existing body of research on market-based reforms, most closely focusing on school choice via charter schools and portfolio districts, demonstrates the need for a new, holistic framework for evaluating market-based school systems. One that reconsiders equity and through the goals of sustainable human and community development.

## Part II: Market-Based Schooling and Sustainability

### School Choice Literature Remains within an Economic Paradigm

With the exceptions of a number of studies that explore how parents navigate choice and/or the meaning they make from having choice (e.g., Bell, 2009; Cooper, 2007; Holme, 2002), most of the research on school choice analyzes how market mechanisms function in a choice system, and therefore does not question the underlying economic model, but rather evaluates its level of effectiveness. These studies tackle topics such as whether competition and choice improve school performance and student outcomes (e.g., Betts & Tang, 2014; CREDO, 2013; Hoxby & Murarka 2008; Ni & Arsen, 2010), whether parents are choosing well (e.g., Harris & Laresen, 2015), how schools and leaders respond to competition (e.g., Holme et al., 2013; Jabbar, 2015; Ladd & Fiske, 2003), and how choice affects student diversity and equity (e.g., Bifulco & Ladd, 2007; Frankenberg et al., 2010). Despite the diversity of methodological and disciplinary approaches, these studies primarily test economic assumptions about choice and charter schools. These studies often downplay the benefits accrued to individuals and the community in the long-term; largely avoid assessing the relationship between choice systems,

communities, and neighborhoods; and frequently presuppose that the purpose of schooling is finite – limited to the academic success of the individual students.

Additionally, the research performed under this economic paradigm places a great emphasis on measurable academic achievement as the indicator of, or proxy for, increased equity, similar to determining economic progress via GNP, GDP, and median incomes. The elevation of individual achievement as the desired outcome has shifted the purpose of education from democratic equality and social efficiency, to social mobility—an individualistic pursuit of credentials that turns families and students into consumers and schools into providers, reducing incentive on both ends to work for the public good or in pursuit of collective goals (Labaree, 1997). Further, as the development literature reviewed in the previous section demonstrates, just as economic growth is only one key ingredient in promoting equity, academic achievement is only one key ingredient for promoting equity for individuals and communities. Recent research focused more closely on neighborhoods, education, and long-term individual and community outcomes confirms this assertion, finding that solely improved academic outcomes are not changing life circumstances, especially in African American communities (e.g., Chetty, 2014; Dobie & Fryer, 2016; Sampson, 2012; Sharkey, 2013). The question then, is: Does the emphasis on greater equity for individual students (as measured by academic achievement) via the market model, come at the expense of community empowerment, or greater equity for the community overall? Existing research on the relationship between school choice and schools, neighborhoods, and community; equity; and race and empowerment help answer this question and raise a number of issues when considering whether the current market approach promotes sustainable individual and community development.

**Neighborhoods, Communities, and Schools and the Introduction of School Choice**

**Neighborhood schools.** Because neighborhoods provide a pre-existing, location-based community, it is not surprising that the considerable body of research on schools, communities, and neighborhoods (e.g., Anyon, 2014; Berliner, 2006; Crowder & South, 2003; Green, 2015; Green & Gooden, 2016) indicates that an important relationship exists between the three. Some scholars have argued that school reform is only successful when linked to community development (e.g., Sampson, 2012; Warren & Mapp, 2011), indicating that inequity in housing, healthcare, safety, and nutrition hampers student progress in schools and must be addressed for meaningful reform to take hold (e.g., Anyon, 2014; Horsford & Sampson, 2014; Noguera, 1996, 2003; Sharkey, 2013; Warren, 2005). Others note that neighborhood schools often serve as anchor institutions (Milner & Howard, 2004; Small, 2009; Taylor, Jr., McGlynn, & Luter, 2013), playing a vital role in bridging citizens to larger institutions; serving as a space of communal ownership; providing stable middle class employment, a local gathering space, and resources; and connecting disenfranchised residents to society (Patterson & Silverman, 2013). Further, public schools are the most accessible and most used public institutions in low-income communities (Patterson & Silverman, 2014), serving as a gateway to democratic engagement and agency – meaning the level of participation at the local school level can influence how much families engage in the larger political arena, experience empowerment, and ultimately perceive themselves as arbiters of their own destiny (Warren & Mapp, 2011). Nearly all of this research, however, presumes neighborhood schools, which are disappearing in urban districts across the country as the portfolio model and charter schools continue to spread.

**School choice and neighborhoods.** In stark contrast to those who see school, neighborhood, and community as inextricably linked and the foundation for development efforts, those who support choice see it as a vehicle to bypass the inequalities at the neighborhood and

community level that frequently become manifest in local public schools. The operating logic is, that if families are not constrained by their geography, i.e., neighborhood assigned school, and can instead choose from a variety of options, then education will improve and equity along with it. The modern choice movement, undergirded by Milton Friedman's theories (1962), see public schools as a monopoly with no incentive to cater to the needs of the community and who fail to offer students and parents (i.e., consumers) alternative options (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Henig, 1994). Conversely, school choice advocates proffer that in market-based, choice models schools are forced to compete for students, and in turn, are motivated to provide services that meet the needs and desires of students and parents (Hoxby, 2003). In this scenario, competition and choice directly benefit individual students' opportunity for a successful life by providing alternatives to the failing neighborhood school. This belief is embodied by the charter movement's rallying cry "zip code isn't destiny." This escape, however, is predicated on a devaluation of the relationship between schools, neighborhoods, and community, and places premium on individual student achievement.

In choice-based districts, schools may pull children from all over the city. The school itself may not have an identity that is attached to the neighborhood in which it is situated (Allen, 2006). In fact, in the era of accountability, choice – operating under the premise of competition – produces schools that are focused inward, striving to prove that high levels of academic achievement are occurring within their four walls (Allen, 2006). Charter systems, specifically, experience additional separation, as they are also often opened and staffed by community outsiders (e.g., Kretchmar et al., 2014; Scott 2013), which may marginalize local priorities (e.g., Scott & DiMartino, 2009; Ravitch 2014), disrupt prior social capital and networks, and fail to establish the level of trust required for parental engagement and democratic feedback. In market

systems, then, schools are frequently geographically dislocated from neighborhoods and conceivably cut-off from the larger community due to the pressure to perform academically.

Additionally, the notion of schooling as divorced from neighborhood and community runs counter to the notion of place-based reform—which has garnered much attention and support in recent years (Miller et. al., 2012)—and is typically the model for community development efforts. The federal government's Choice Neighborhoods Initiative by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Promise Neighborhoods and Full Service Community School Grants offered by the Department of Education, the complete communities movement framework (Brooks & Ohland, 2012), and Asset Based Community Development (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003) are all examples of attempts to increase equity and opportunity by building upon existing community assets in low-income, urban neighborhoods. The literature suggests, then, that introducing choice is likely to complicate broader equity goals that target neighborhood and community—in particular, posing possible threats to social capital networks, diminishing community organizing and capacity building efforts, and in the case of charter schools removing physical public space as a resource. Thus far, scholars have not yet examined the interaction between place-based reform efforts and school choice policies. However, within the school choice literature there is a slim, but quickly growing body of research that explores the relationship between neighborhoods, communities, and schools in choice settings.

**Geography**. Using geography and Geographic Information System software (GIS), researchers have begun to explore the relationship between place, space, distance and school choice (Henig, 2009b). These studies tend to focus on demand-side questions, like how parents construct their choice sets based on geographic factors (Bell, 2009), or supply-side questions,

like how schools decide where to locate in a competitive market (Lubienski, Gulosino and Weitzel, 2009). There is also research that explores whether distance is a prohibitive factor in choice settings (e.g., Harris & Larsen, 2015), negating the supposed benefit of greater educational opportunity. Yet, none of these studies examines the way that choice-heavy districts interplay with the notion of place and community.

**Market-based reform, choice, and community.** A few scholars, however, have begun to explore the community impact of school choice and the disappearance of neighborhood schools. Choice and charter models, which are inherently detached from place, force schools to rethink how they define community from the outset, the role they play in the community in which they are physically located and the larger community/city they serve. Two studies (Allen, 2006; Beabout & Boselovic, 2106) contemplate and examine community participation and engagement and community-school relationships when charters school are introduced into a system. Allen (2006), through in-depth qualitative research based in Michigan, found that charter schools tend to define community as a *school community*, an insular entity comprised of teachers, staff, and students and their families, whose collaboration is in service of higher achievement. Further, the charters she studies had few or weak relationships with non-school community leaders and members and institutions in the surrounding neighborhood. One possible reason for this is a shift in perspective: the school is now a private good, run and operated by an independent private board and/or charter management organization, with a privately owned and operated building—not a public good accessible to and owned by everyone.

In contrast, Beabout and Boselovic (2016) explore the development of two community initiated charter schools in New Orleans who bucked the traditional model of the standards, managerial, and efficiency focused schools that have a foothold in the current urban educational

landscape. They conclude that in the unique, but proliferating, choice landscape of New Orleans, communities can build trust and collaborate to create schools that serve the needs and desires of a community—but only with significantly laid groundwork to form a strong social network. Even still, equity and inclusion remain an issue. The efforts profiled in their work ran along more privileged racial and socioeconomic lines—failing to fully include the aspirations of a large chunk of the New Orleans population who send their children to public schools.

Further probing into questions about access, power and control, and community, other studies (e.g., Buras, 2013; Debray et al., 2014; Kretchmar et al., 2014; Scott, 2011, 2013) have focused on tracking the elite policy networks driving choice, who, studies find, are often accountable to national and state level financiers (Reckhow, 2010) and committed to furthering an agenda focused on the proliferation of the charter model. These authors observe that the political and financial priorities of these networks tend to trump an ethical or moral commitment to students and the community and have therefore yielded a sidelining of community interests. Further, the distracting rhetoric of school choice as a civil rights project works to undermine the process of democratic decision making (Buras 2013; Scott, 2013), marginalizing community voices raised in opposition to reforms and in support of equity and justice (Buras 2015; Dixson, Buras, & Jeffers, 2015). Because the heaviest push for charter schools and portfolio models occur in large urban areas, the impact of such reforms are disproportionately felt by low-income, communities of color. This research, then, raises serious questions and concerns about the agency and inclusion of communities of color in key decisions regarding the future of their families, communities, and cities—a requisite condition for sustainable and equitable development.

**Communities of Color, School Choice, and Inequality**

Scholars critical of market-based reforms indicate that the exclusion of communities of color is a direct consequence of a subscription to neoliberalism and the racial imbalances inherent within. These researchers have produced work that is situated within a larger critique of neoliberalism, which links education reform to displacement and dispossession (Buras, 2015; Lipman, 2011; Stovall, 2013), a privatization agenda (e.g., Apple, 2006; Ball 2007; Burch, 2009), and a revocation of democratic processes (Scott, 2011, 2013). Frequently, their critique of market-based reforms and school choice pit the "reform community" against the "local community," noting that the two do not, and cannot, have an overlapping agenda or shared interests. Further, often grounded in critical race studies, these scholars note that structural and systemic racial and economic imbalances hinder any joint-effort at community development from furthering equity and empowerment. (Buras 2013; de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009; Dixon et al., 2015; Henig, 2009a; Schneider et al., 1997). In their critiques, some of these scholars leave little room for healthy debate about how to improve charters schools' and choice-based systems' capacity to effectively engage with community and incorporate choice equitably, and like their education reformer counterparts, feed the polarizing discourse around charters and choice (Henig, 2008; Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014; Stulberg, 2016). However, their work is vital in its emphasis on the inextricable and tenuous relationship between market-based education reform and communities of color.

The growth of the charter sector, and the choice movement at large, cannot be separated from issues of race, inequality, and power. This is both because the recipients of school choice, in the form of charters, vouchers, and portfolio districts, are most often black and brown, low-income families (see Table 2), and because of the fairly long-standing political support among

the African American community, for school choice efforts (Pattillo, 2015; Stulberg, 2008, 2014). Support exists for a variety reasons, most of which harken back to the long and strained relationship between public school institutions and the African American community.

Table 2

*Demographics of Public and Charter Schools 2016-2017*

| | **All Public Schools** | **All Charters** | **Public Schools in Cities** | **Charters in Cities** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Tot Enroll (in thousands)** | 50,274,747 | 3,010,287 | 13,674,731 | 1,685,760 |
| **% of each school type** | 100% | 6% | 27% | 56% |
| **% White** | 48% | 32% | 27% | 23% |
| **% Black** | 15.5% | 27.1% | 21% | 35% |
| **% Hispanic** | 24.8% | 30.0% | 36% | 38% |
| **% Asian** | 4.8% | 3.7% | 7% | 4% |

*Note*: Date compiled from the National Center for Education Statistics, 2016-2017

Historically, there has been considerable support in urban communities, particularly among African Americans, for alternate models of education, choice, and charters (Fuller, 2002; Henry, Jr., & Dixon, 2016; Scott, 2011; Stulberg, 2008, 2015, 2016), but this support is complex. Since the civil war, African Americans have fought for public schools that will educate their children – believing that literacy and formal education were the means to liberation and freedom (Anderson, 1988). The robust movement for universal education among ex-slaves was undergirded by the value of self-help and self-determination, and a deep-seated desire to "control and sustain schools for themselves and their children" (p.5). This desire represents a through line throughout the history of African American schooling, evidenced in the community control movement, independent schools movement, the push for vouchers, and now support for charters

(Fuller, 2002; Pedroni, 2007; Stulberg, 2014, 2016). The interaction between African Americans and school choice reforms are significant "because they reveal a range of ways in which African American communities and leaders have retained involvement in schooling and hope for its potential, even in the face of frustration and despair with the status quo" (Stulberg, 2008, p. 157). Presently, the charter movement is perceived among many in the African American community as a "mechanism for (relative) autonomy and self-determination that allows them to establish and govern schools they believe will me more reflective of the cultural background of students and community mores" (Henry, Jr., & Dixon, 2016, p. 220).

Choice is also presented as civil right and a tool of empowerment, an act of citizenship even. Fuller (2002) asserts that without choice "parents are disenfranchised at a critical point of engagement in the education of their sons and daughters" (p.2). Further, choice, in theory, provides a way to combat the inequality of opportunity in education that is a facet of systemic racism in housing and employment—impeding African American families from accessing the best schools. Yet, few (e.g., Pattillo, 2016; Scott, 2011, 2013) are studying and questioning this assertion, instead policymakers and advocates use choice as a proxy for empowerment, civic participation, and democracy (i.e., civil rights) – taking for granted that the relationship is direct, when in fact, there is little empirical evidence that demonstrates this is case (Pattillo, 2016).

As the charter movement continues to grow, support among communities of color has begun to wane. In response to the failed promise of charter schools as a better choice for people of color, in August 2016, the NAACP and the Black Lives Matter Movement released platforms that call for a moratorium on charters (Perry, 2016). Both groups cite concerns over lack of self-determination and democratic control, the school-to-prison pipeline, the influence of large foundations and corporations, access to culturally relevant curriculum, an overemphasis on

standardized testing, the draining of resources from traditional public schools, and hypersegregation (The Movement for Black Lives, 2016, NAACP, 2016). Research too, lays bare some of these concerns. Henry Jr. and Dixson (2016) examined the application and contract process (Henry & Dixson, 2016), wherein they noticed a marked lack of home-grown, community run charters—calling into question the politics and power of authorizers and the generally democratic nature of the process. The opening of charters—often accompanied by the closing of a traditional school—also comes with the oft required "side-effect" of firing middle class teachers of color to start with a new, mission aligned, staff (White, 2016), all of which can have devastating effects on communities. Finally, the proliferation of No Excuses charter schools, which maintain a philosophy that low-income students of color require a different type of education than middle and upper class (predominately) white students (Golann, 2015; Whitman, 2008), and promote a culture of compliance rather than exploration and deliberation, raise serious questions about the damage done to students self-conceptions and ability to be agents of their own liberation and success (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Freire, 1971; Giroux, 1983; Golann, 2015; Goodman & Uzun, 2013; Lack, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nunn 2014; Sondel, 2016).

While these concerns do not explicitly reverse the sentiment on choice, they do call into question the impact of charter schools not only on the African American community, but also on all communities of color. For all of these reasons, is it of the utmost import to study the ways in which such systems hold potential for exacerbating or reducing inequity that goes beyond using the standard, short-term, economic-centered approaches for evaluating success. The hope and promise of charter schools as a lever for self-determination and community engagement, and therefore community development, seems, thus far, to have been left unfulfilled.

**Market Reforms and Justice-Oriented Equitable Development**

As the review above demonstrates, choice systems, particularly charter-centered ones, create a number of potential challenges for intra and inter-generational development. There is a significant gap in the literature on school choice, in that very few researchers are approaching their analysis from a systems perspective, and further, few are interrogating how such a reform impacts equity at an individual *and* community level – a key consideration when the goal is greater social equity in the long term. Even if individual charter schools are raising achievement among low-income students of color in urban districts (CREDO, 2015), the systemic impact of choice and charters remains largely unexamined. It is, therefore, vital, that education researchers pose the same question asked by sustainable, human and community develop scholars: do market conditions (i.e. education systems with choice and competition, decentralization, and test-based accountability), create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, fulfilling lives; to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living; and to be able to participate in the life of the community (United Nations Human Development Programme, 2001)? More specifically, when analyzing policy interventions:

1. How have interventions benefitted different groups in society?
2. Have some groups gained at the expense of others?
3. Are poor and disadvantaged communities more empowered?
4. Do the policies work in conjunction to:
    a. Improve the quality of people's lives?
    b. Improve the quality of education?
    c. Improve security and safety?
    d. Reduced discrimination in society?
    e. Improve public participation and deepen democracy?

The body of research on education markets and sustainable, human, and community development provide the tools to help determine the answer to that question. While research, thus far, indicates that closing academic achievement gaps alone will not fix inequality in

America, we have not yet successfully developed a way to gauge the ways in which choice districts may be enhancing or reducing equity at the individual and community level, in the short and long term. Schools, alone, will never solve the problem of social inequity in America; that requires policy actors across multiple arenas need to work in concert with one another to form effective and lasting programs aimed at equality and poverty. Yet, overlooking the central role schools play is a mistake, especially considering that schools are the closest, most prevalent, frequently and easily accessed public institution in distressed neighborhoods (Patterson & Silverman, 2013), harboring great potential for fostering all the key elements justice-oriented equitable development. Schools formed by and with the community, have the capacity to build cohesion and capital, trust, institutional trust, empowerment and agency, and civic responsibility and engagement, in addition to providing the education and learning that can yield mobility and opportunity. At the same time, however, schools disconnected from community, have the power to diminish these very same features and damage prospects for greater social equity among low-income, communities of color.

## Part III: New Framework for Evaluating Market-Based Education Systems

*"No level of individual self-actualization alone can sustain the marginalized and oppressed. We must be linked to collective struggle, to communities of resistance that move outward into the world."* (bell hooks, 1993)

Market-based school systems raise a host of new questions concerning equity and sustainability—ones that cannot be answered solely via test scores and graduation rates. Instead of using a standard, one-dimensional measure of success (i.e. academic achievement), I propose an alternative framework for evaluating choice and charter-centered districts that takes a systems perspective and draws on concepts from sustainable, human, and community development. This framework moves beyond individual and aggregate school performance on exams, and provides a means, through the lens of equity, to incorporate the experience and impact of choice-based

school systems on communities, and cities in which they are nested. Though this framework relies on ideas from sustainable development as its base, it also recognizes flaws in the theory's design and practice, specifically in its failure to protect and uplift vulnerable communities. Despite these flaws, a sustainable development perspective emphasizes both the present and the future, specifically in terms of managing trade-offs, planning for goals and outcomes, and accounting for interdependency among humans, and between humans, the economy, and the environment. As such, this framework builds from, but seeks to improve upon, sustainable development models, while also translating the theory into an appropriate form for the assessment market-based education systems.

The literature review outlined in detail many of the critiques and questions being raised by scholars unconvinced of the market approach to education. This section draws from those concerns, traces how they map onto the prevailing trends in economic development and provides some further justification for the creation and application of this framework. I begin by defining what I mean by equitable, social sustainable development in education markets. I then outline the four major domains of my framework, and for each offer questions researchers, policymakers, and practitioners can ask when planning or evaluating an education marketplace (i.e. choice, portfolio, or charter district).

## Schools as Promoters Justice-Oriented Equitable Development

The measures we use to judge a system, whether it be economic, political, social, or educational, deeply impact policy and practice. Focusing too narrowly on outcomes or single measures, allows us to miss the larger picture and create vibrant, flexible, resilient systems that are responsive and promote equity. Using key concepts from sustainable, human, and community development, the framework described below can be employed to plan and assess education

markets (see Figure 2 for visual). As opposed to sitting as one of the legs of the 3E's triangle, equity sits at the core of four major domains. This framework then, can be used for developing and evaluating policies, institutions, and systems that focus on equity now and in the future, by targeting outcomes that fall into four domains: mobility and opportunity; agency, well-being; and trust. This definition also relies on the premise that individuals are part of communities or ecosystems (complex interrelated networks), that, to remain resilient (i.e., sustainable), must have strong, democratic lines of communication and flexibility to respond to setbacks, mistakes and changes (Capra, 1994).

Given that communities and schools are part of a complex system, this framework provides a tool to assess choice-based systems and their relationship to the individuals that make up communities within the system. Ultimately, by demonstrating how the system and the outcomes for the population (community) measure against specific s indicators (Figure 2), we

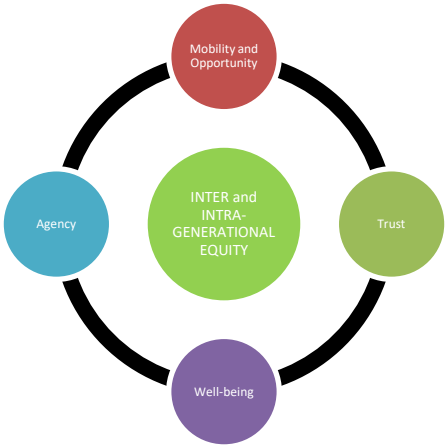


*Figure 2*: Justice-Oriented Equitable Development for Education Markets

can determine how and in which ways choice districts currently promote or hinder their own sustainable development and that of the city or place in which they are located. The measures proposed in this framework are an attempt to refocus the assessment of schools and school systems, particularly one's influenced by market-based reform, on the individuals that make up

the communities served by schools.

**The Domains**

The final section of this paper outlines the four major domains in this framework. In each section, I define the domain, provide some examples how it might be measured, and offer questions that researchers, policymakers, and practitioners should be asking around these domains when planning or evaluating a market-driven choice or charter-heavy system.

**Mobility and opportunity.** Mobility and opportunity, as is the case for each of the four indicators, focuses both on the present and future lives of students, as well as the lives of parents – maintaining the focus on intra and intergenerational equity. As discussed earlier, the mobility and opportunity domain is most akin to the typical measurements of successful schools and districts (test scores, graduation rates, etc.). After those few common measures, this domain departs from conventional assessments of quality school performance. It is intended to capture, more fully than at present, how schools and districts further the goal of equality of opportunity for students, families, and community. When considering this domain, one should be asking: *In what way are schools and districts harnessing the power of education, of direct community participation, and ties to local groups, businesses, and organizations to truly aid in materially improving the lives of the families it serves?*

So while the typical measures of academic performance are included within this domain (i.e. state test scores), this framework urges a broadening of these measures, and a de-emphasis on them as the prime indicator of "success." We must acknowledge that a literate (in English and math) citizenry is key to furthering the goal of equity and democratic participation, but literacy is only the base upon which education occurs. The two are not one in the same, and the tests currently being administered cannot account for what kind of education our students are

receiving. Additionally, graduation rates and tests scores that indicate college readiness on a national scale (ACT/SAT, AP/IB) provide useful information on who has access to certain types of courses, at what level students within schools and districts are performing, and how many students complete high school. These data are important but should be viewed as starting points to attain greater information regarding the distribution of basic education within and across schools, and to then plan how to support, develop, or close those schools that are trailing behind. Instead, they are typically used to qualify a school as good or bad, deserving a reward or punishment, and students as merely data points in the drive to meet accountability standards.

One drawback of only measuring student outcomes is that the data does not fully capture what is happening to all school-age children across the community, but also leaves out anything related to their parents, families, and the community. For example, students who are not in school (whether they have dropped out, or their parents chose not to enroll them) are completely left out of the picture. The health of the larger community, either at the neighborhood or city level, is just as dependent on the number of students not in school, as on how the performance of those who are in school. One possible indicator that would fall under this domain, then, would capture the percentage of school-aged children actually in school. In New Orleans, for example, this is of particular concern, as recent data suggests that possibly thousands of students are not attending school and are unaccounted for by current governance structures (Davis, 2015).

Another measure of mobility and opportunity is looking at the percent of working age adults who are currently employed. If schools are indeed increasing opportunity, then students who graduate should be gainfully employed, or working towards a degree – necessitating a long-term, longitudinal approach to assessing schools. Additionally, the percent of the population with degrees in higher education should be on the rise. Education reform that promotes sustainable

development also must focus on adults in the community, increasing access to opportunity and mobility for them as well. Data collection on work training offerings, school and district level employment, and contracting with minority owned local businesses, are all taken in account in this framework.

**Trust (Transparent, responsive and efficient institutions).** As charter density increases, and/or as districts move towards a portfolio model, governance becomes increasingly layered and complicated. Individual charter schools, or the full network of charter schools within a city, are frequently considered their own district or local education agency, wherein some are run by nationally based charter management organizations (CMOs), others are run by locally-based CMOs, and a fair number are independent, or lone, charter schools. All of them have their own, local, private boards and an authorizing entity to whom they are accountable, frequently in addition to the state. This multi-layered, partially democratic governance structure may complicate the ability to cultivate transparent, efficient, and responsive institutions, and therefore, influence relationship with families, and the larger community. The maze of institutions, governing bodies, and individual leaders has the potential to confound attempts at generating trust and maintaining transparency, vital to maintaining any change or reform effort (Fine, 1993; Sen, 1999; Warren 2005), as the absence of either diminishes buy-in and signals to the community a power imbalance that does not prioritize them.

Though, in this largely decentralized school marketplace, individual schools are supposed to take on greater responsibility for attending to students and parents' needs (Hill et. al., 2013), they also must weigh competing demands from multiple governing entities—conceivably diminishing their capacity to respond effectively and efficiently to families' needs and wants. Families, too, may have difficulty navigating the multiple institutions—who do not necessarily

have an incentive to coordinate—that make up the governance structure, and accessing those people and entities with decision making capacity, especially those connected to national CMOs. If this is the case, the education markets leave families largely excluded from governing their own schools, relegating them solely to a consumer status. Consumers' voices are heard through their actions in the market, in this case, opting in and out of schools, negating families' opportunity to exert direct pressure for change at an institution they already attend.

Additionally, with so much emphasis on autonomy, school level decisions have the capacity to shift the system away from equity (i.e. charging parents for extra activities or resources and acting in the school's self-interest vs. interest of the larger community) (Levin, 2012). Autonomy combined with an open market philosophy, raises stability as a major concern. At the individual level, students may frequently switch schools. At charter schools, teachers have been found to leave their positions at much higher rates. Due to market forces and accountability, schools open and close with greater frequency. These factors raise important questions about efficiency (i.e. financial and human capital for starting a new school, students and teachers repeatedly learning new systems and cultures) and coordination (i.e. with no centralized system students records may not easily follow them), both of which are required to maintain a stable school system—which in lower income communities should be a priority, as school are often the most consistent and stable institutions/aspects in the community (Noguera, 2001). Finally, the philosophy and approach of different charter schools, plays a role in their mission, discipline structure, culture, and pedagogical approach, both creating the market of options, but also influencing the interaction with and prioritizing of students, their parents, the community.

When considering institutions and governance, then, sustainable and equitable reform, means finding the appropriate balance between the laissez-faire governance of current choice and

portfolio models, and the more democratic but ultra-centralized traditional model. Domain 2, focused on Trust asks the question: *in a market-model, how do institutions and systems of governance effectively serve and respond to student, family, and community needs and wants in terms of efficiency, transparency, coordination,* and *collaboration?* The measures captured in this indicator are an attempt to make more concrete the areas of governance and institutional cooperation and coordination are in need of special attention. Ultimately, institutions and systems of governance need to create a policy environment that allows for positive growth in the other three domains.

**Agency.** In a research synthesis on agency, Campbell (2009) notes that agency is often undefined or lacking clarity and used to describe to different actions taken by individuals. Campbell identifies these two types of agency, and then expands on what they mean and how researchers might use them. The first, power of agency or individual agency (Pattillo, 2015), is the ability to make a voluntary action in a specific situation or to achieve a particular task – the power to do something. Agentic power, "the ability of individuals to act independently of social structural constraints" (Campbell, 2009, p. 416), on the other hand, is about transformation or the effects of one's actions. At its most basic level, agentic power is power over a situation, "including realizing an impact on others or an impact on the structural context" (Pattillo, 2015, p. 46). Couched within an understanding of agency are the concepts of empowerment and control, both of which are frequently employed in discussions of school choice. Yet, is often the case that these three interrelated terms refer to individual agency via consumer power and not agentic power, a particularly important distinction to unpack and explore when looking at the community impact of portfolio models.

Amartya Sen (1999), a leading voice in advocating for human development and the capability approach in sustainable development posits "people have to be seen…as being actively involved – given the opportunity – in sharing their own destiny, and not just as passive recipients of the fruits of cunning development programs" (Sen, 1999, p. 53). The same holds true in education reform, especially as there remains a decided power imbalance among those creating and leading the school system and those using the system (Noguera, 2001; Scott; 2013; Warren and Mapp 2011). Those who promote and support market-based systems must not confuse the notion of choosing a school from a prescribed set of options with an empowered citizenry (Pattillo, 2015; Scott, 2013). Leaders, teachers, politicians, and advocates must see and treat students, parents, and the larger community as agents rather than patients, as they are not solely inert beneficiaries, but desire to be and must be involved in the process of increasing their capabilities. In any system committed to reducing, and eventually eradicating, inequity, breaking down barriers to engagement, participation, and democratic empowerment are vital to sustainability. Social exclusion must be a priority consideration, wherein all personnel from the top to the bottom ask: what are the barriers to taking part in the life of the community? For the system not only to remain viable, to grow a resilient and more equitable community, reformers must share power with the community, appreciate assets that already exists, and find genuine ways to value, validate, and incorporate community voices, ideas and needs into the system (e.g., Kretzman & McKnight, 1993; Warren & Mapp, 2011).

Exercising agency is easier when opportunity, as described above, exists. However, it depends on a perception of power, and the ability to take effective action. While reformers, leaders, and teachers must be cognizant of their role in collaborating and building capacity among parents (i.e. opening up opportunity for action), parents and students themselves also

must feel they are empowered to act (perceive that they are invited and have a seat at the table). Beyond that, they need to have cultivated social capital (relationships) and skills that allow them to act on behalf the individual and collective interests. Partnerships and engagement with schools greatly enhances the ability of individuals and the community to act as agents leading to both the betterment of schools and the communities they serve (Hess, 1995; Bryk et al., 1998), but individuals can exercise agency even when no opportunity is presented to them, as long as they perceive a sense of power and harness their resources to actively and successfully push for change. Conversely, a system that shuts out the community and causes them to withdraw and lose real and/or perceived power, can diminish agency and therefore have lasting negative impacts on students, families, and the community.

While the relationship between adults and the district are vital, a healthy democracy (Labaree, 1997; Unterhalter, 2009) also depends on a vibrant system of education for students – one which must be differentiated from successful schooling. Education, critical thinking and imaginative learning (Nussbaum, 2006), brings with it empowerment. Without education, those who are marginalized or oppressed may not have the resources to denounce the injustices they suffer from and to claim their rights (Freire, 1971). In this way, how schools function, what they teach, how they teach, and how they discipline students are vitally important in whether or not they increase the opportunities for equity amongst students.

**Well-being.** Finally, a system that promotes equitable sustainable development improves quality of life (well-being from this point forward) at the individual and collective level. *Well-being* refers to both the objective (e.g., physical and mental health, security, stability, etc.) and subjective (feelings about state of one's life) life experiences of people as the substantive freedoms one has to lead the kind of life one has reason to value (Sen, 1999). Further it presumes

an equilibrium between the resources one has and the desired achievements and/or challenges one faces (Dodge et al., 2012). A school system, a public institution, should at a minimum maintain the well-being of individuals and the community, and at best, actively improve it. The measures in this fourth indicator are designed to capture improvement in well-being for the student, the parent or family, and the overall community. This is certainly subjective in many ways, which is why it is so important to attempt to capture. It allows us to better understand how this major educational shift affects people's daily lives. At the same time, there are certain factors that are commonly associated with well-being: stability (security), health, community participation, self-esteem etc. So, though causal claims are difficult to make, a successful system of education should positively correlate with experiences in the larger community in areas like reduced crime and incarceration, increased employment and income (see Heckman & Masterov (2007), as an example and exception), reduced stress and anxiety, and increased satisfaction, accomplishment and sense of control.

Charter-heavy, portfolio like systems raise important questions around well-being. For example, low income families, who are often already stretched beyond capacity, may find the work and pressure of making a good choice stressful, either further straining family resources or inducing the family to withdraw from the market (Pattillo, 2015). Uncertainty surrounding school assignments, managing transportation, and frequent opening and closing of schools among other features of an education marketplace, may also make the system appear as an undue burden and generate a sense of instability. Additionally, as discussed in the previous section, the opportunity, or lack thereof, to be an active participant in the system, yielding a sense of control, affects individuals' positive and negative perceptions and experiences, and therefore their well-being. There is a real possibility that market-centered systems geared towards low-income

communities of color place an undue burden on families, especially as the majority of students across the nation continue to attend their neighborhood schools, and middle class families appear to be choosing to live in suburbs that provide good neighborhood schools or they are actively working to recreate neighborhood schools in urban spaces (e.g., Billingham, 2015; Cucchiara, 2013).

For students specifically, at a time when there is high priority on getting results, especially in charter schools who need to justify their existence, well-being may ignored or purposely sacrificed in the name of a better education (i.e. evidenced by increased test scores). The literature on human and community development, however, warn against making this trade-off. Ultimately, the goal of economic growth, or in this case, educational attainment, is to allow humans to live the life they value, *now and in the future*. Some of the potential negative consequences of this approach—inequitable and unsustainable from a development perspective—include a devaluing of student and family culture, a deficit approach, strict and stringent discipline regimes that emphasize control and compliance, high stress surrounding performance, a lack of creative outlets, and a generally limited opportunity to have a wholly fulfilling educational experience. In this domain, then, the indicators taken as a whole ask: *In seeking to provide greater life opportunities for students, does a market-based system also positively impact the lived experience of parents and students, in the near and far term?*

## Chapter Summary

Market-based education reform, as borne under neoliberal ideology, completely leaves out questions surrounding the interaction between individual and community well-being, agency, and equity. When perusing the extant literature that has amassed over the past 15 years, student achievement on state tests consistently shapes the narrative. When, and if, other facets of school

and community are considered, like community impact, parent engagement, inclusion of services, or school culture, they are most often through the lens of whether or not these reforms or models contribute to increased achievement and are studied thusly in the literature. Finally, school choice specifically, is promoted as a civil right, as increasing empowerment, and as tool for improving equity—claims which are largely taken for granted and rarely tested empirically (Fuller, 2004; Patillo, 2015; Scott, 2013a, 2013b).

To add to the slowly burgeoning body of work on charter schools, choice systems, and market-based reforms and their relationship to community, equity, and urban development, this study employs a new framework developed out of the fields of sustainable, human, and community development, which is used in conjunction with equity questions raised in the literature on school choice. This research examines whether market-based systems have the capacity to promote equity at the individual, community, and system level. This approach allows for a deep dive into the experiences of students and families with charter and portfolio-based school choice, voices that are rarely heard in the literature or in the policy realm, while simultaneously assessing the ways in which the system shapes these experiences, ultimately tying those findings to the short-and-long term implications for equity.

# CHAPTER 3: METHODS

This study examined the equity implications for vulnerable populations when policies grounded in neoliberalism concurrently shaped both district-level school reform and economic development in post-Katrina New Orleans. I evaluated these policies using critical policy analysis (Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield & Lee, 2014; Diem & Young, 2015; Horsford, Scott & Anderson, 2019; Young & Reynolds, 2017) and a new framework built upon non-traditional measures of equity (e.g. in education see Schneider, 2017; in economics and development see Sen, 2005 or ul Haq , 2003)

This study aims to investigate and reframe the prevailing narrative surrounding market-centric reforms, such as urban renewal and charter-heavy portfolio districts. Up to this point, that narrative has largely been dominated by easily measurable data, like GDP and test scores, failing to incorporate a broader set of outcomes that impact students, families, and communities. As Donald Campbell (1979) warned over thirty years ago, “the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor” (p. 85). The continued national focus on “scores” or other easily quantifiable data (Kamenetz, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016) in education has had a similar effect. Policymakers, researchers, and practitioners have veered away from measuring and observing a multitude of other outcomes in education. At the same time, schools have adopted strategies that aid in boosting test scores and graduation rates, but do not necessarily provide a strong education to children.

In addition to quantitative indicators of policies and programs, it is also important to understand how participants experience a program or intervention (Campbell, 1979). Too much

reliance on quantitative findings can lead to the "neglect of relevant qualitative contextual evidence" or "overdependence upon a few quantified abstractions to the neglect of contradictory and supplementary qualitative evidence" (p. 69). In education policy this can be seen in the tendency to use an increase in test scores as a justification for potentially harmful byproducts of schooling decisions (for an example, see Bross, Harris, & Liu, 2016). In sum, without the inclusion of a broad set of qualitative measures, people become data points, and their stories, goals, growth, and progress can be overlooked.

I employed a multimethod (Burch & Heinrich; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) embedded case study design (Eisenhardt, 1989) to examine the mechanisms through which neoliberal policy interventions affect equity among vulnerable communities. This methodology also aligns with a systems approach, which promotes simultaneously examining macro- and micro-level data, to understand the interconnected nature of the schools, families, and communities. To that end, I asked the following research questions:

4. *How does the introduction of a charter- or choice-centric school system fit into the larger project of the "redevelopment" of a city?*
5. *In what ways does the interaction of city and school reform (dis)empower different populations?*
6. *What are various stakeholders' perceptions of mobility and opportunity; trust; agency; and well-being, and how do those perceptions speak to the school system's ability to increase equity?*

## Positionality and Epistemology

### Positionality

When I was a teacher I spent half of my six years in the classroom in a charter school and all my time working with vulnerable populations. As my career progressed, I became increasingly interested in how policies, politics, and race-power relationships shaped the lives of the families in my school-community and the delivery and development of the education systems I worked in, leading me to a doctoral program in education policy. One of my courses,

sustainable urban development, sharpened my interest around these topics and shaped the questions in this dissertation. The course caused me to rethink how we define equity in education, what measures we use, and which populations are "counted" in present conceptions of equity. Further, I became convinced that without understanding, studying, and advocating for cross-sector policy-making we are not able to effectively plan and deliver equity to student and families. Finally, I began to see multiple connections between neoliberal economic development and neoliberal school reform and drew on criticisms of modern economic development to think about education policy through a wider lens and focus on alternate measures of equity and quality.

**Epistemology**

The research questions in this dissertation are also fundamentally shaped by my ontological and epistemological orientation—a combination of critical realism (Maxwell, 2013) and critical theory (Creswell, 2014). These are premised primarily on three core understandings of the world. One, there is a world that exists apart from human consciousness. This is a physical world, one we do not completely understand, but is nonetheless very real. We learn about this world through observations, experimentation, and physical stimuli. Two, there is a social world, which we have created, and each of us experiences it a little differently. This world is real, but only known to each of us individually – even if, and when, collective experiences are shared. And three, there are systems and structures created in this social world that have generated a reality—an unequal reality—that very much shapes everyday life experiences. Meaning, I believe systems of power; social relationships; and race, gender, sexuality, and class interact to generate inequality and injustice in service of preserving the status quo. As such, the way I approach and analyze data will always be informed by my belief that human experience is a

product of the society we have created (i.e. historical, cultural, and social context matter), and it is irreconcilably connected to race, status, access, capital, and power.

In this study, then, I am seeking to understand how policy and politics interact with issues of power and race by examining the policy environment in post-Katrina New Orleans. My justice-oriented equitable development framework shaped both my research questions and analysis but was built upon my understanding of the world. Put plainly, I enter this study with a distinct view of inequity, structural racism, and discrimination, and am conducting this work to address questions and concerns over social justice and equity as they pertain to the intersection of market-based economic development and education reform. The case study and critical policy analysis research design outlined below provided the means to examine the complex web of policies formulated in the weeks and months after Katrina, and analyze what the process, implementation, and outcomes of those policies means for equity in the city of New Orleans.

## Research Design

### Embedded, Single Case Study

Case studies are best suited to research seeking to understand the dynamics in a particular setting (Eisenhardt, 1989), offering an approach to "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context," (Yin, 2009, p. 13), allowing investigators to "retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 2003, p. 2). Case studies also allow researchers to gather rich, in-depth information from multiple data sources and ultimately produce findings that have implications for policy and future research (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2009). For this study, that case or setting was the interaction of urban development and education reform.

Within this larger case, I selected New Orleans as my site, as it is a prime example of this phenomenon (Ragin, 1992). The complete takeover and chartering of New Orleans schools, paired with the post-Katrina redevelopment of the city, is an illustration of this case taken to the extreme—demonstrating the ultimate outcomes of implementing full-scale neoliberal policy solutions in multiple public sectors (e.g., housing, economy, education) to combat years of disinvestment and neglect in typically majority black cities (e.g., Camden, Newark, Detroit, Washington D.C., Cleveland). Further, New Orleans has marketed itself as a model for education reforms to these and other cities (Buras, 2013; Brinson, Boast, Hassel, & Kingland, 2012). As a result, I chose a single case design (Miles, et al., 2014; Yin 2013). Further, while school reform and urban renewal in New Orleans have both been studied separately, the relationship between the two is underexamined. In order to capture the multiple connected layers of politics, power, race, and equity surrounding the reforms in post-Katrina New Orleans, I employed an embedded, single case study design, in which there are nested subunits of analysis (Yin, 2017) (see figure 3). This approach allowed me to capture socio-political context at city level, make connections to the school district level, and then dive down into the thoughts and experiences of individual stakeholders within the system.

**Critical Policy Analysis.** Critical policy analysis (CPA) informed the data collection and analysis for the case study. In their recent book, Horsford, Scott, & Anderson (2019) explain that "CPA provides a realist perspective for analyzing policy in an era of widening inequality and political divisions across lines of race, class, gender, geography, and citizenship" (p. 21). Further, CPA "requires an explicit standpoint towards social equality at the point of asking research questions" (Horsford et al., 2019, p. 42). Unlike traditional policy analysis, CPA is a research

approach that is intended to capture the subjectivity and complexity of all stages of the policy process (Horsford et al., 2019), with a focus on the effect of policy outcomes on disenfranchised

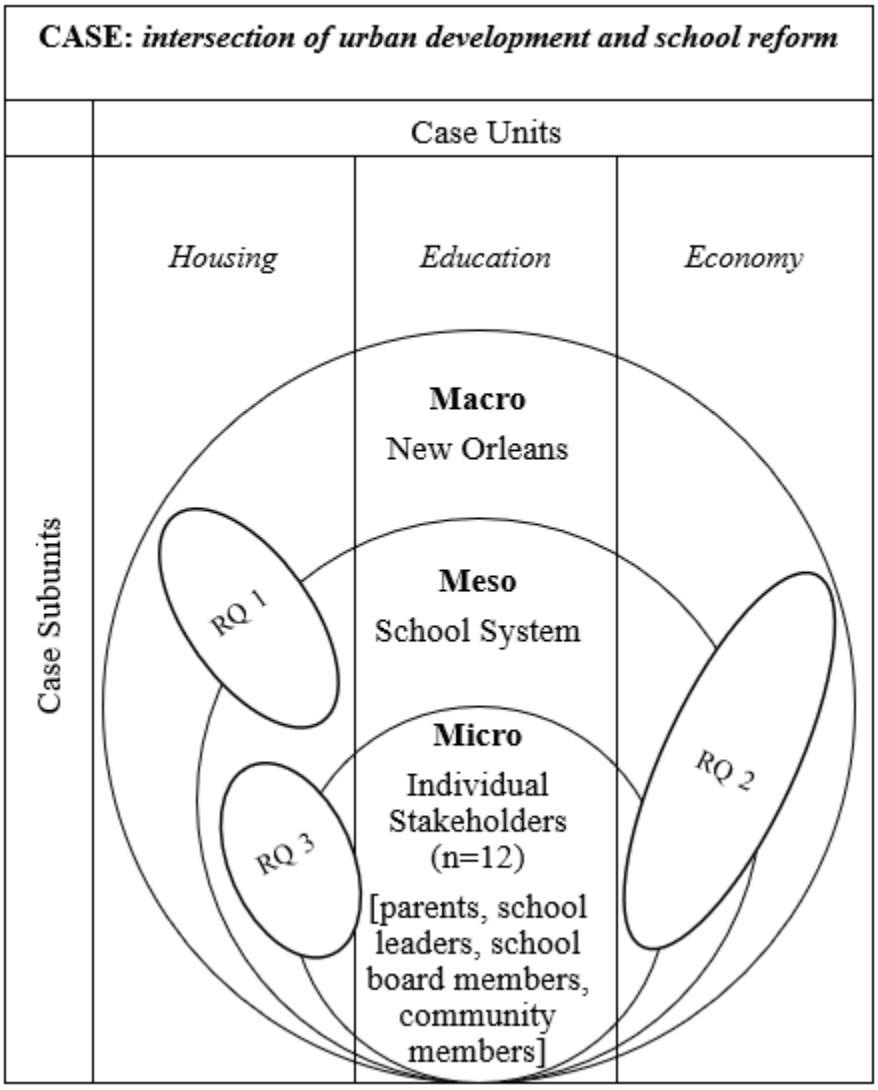


*Figure 3*. Framework for Embedded, Single Case Design

people and communities (Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, & Lee, 2014). More specifically, as Diem et al. (2019, p. 6) outline, CPA mostly frequently focuses on

1. The difference between policy rhetoric and practiced reality

2. The roots and development of policy (e.g. how it emerged, what problems it was intended to solve, how it changed and developed over time, and its role in reinforcing the dominant culture)

3. The distribution of power, resources, and knowledge and the creation of policy "winners' and "losers"

4. Social stratification and the broader effects of policy on relationships of inequality and privilege; and

5. The nature of resistance to or engagement in policy by members of non-dominant groups

CPA scholars use a variety of methods, including: observations, interviews, mass media analysis, document analysis, discourse analysis, examination of databases and data trends, and literature reviews (Young & Reynolds, 2017). These varied sources of data allow the researcher to engage in a core component of CPA, "concentrated looking" (Diem and Young, 2015), in which the researcher engages in collecting and analyzing "contextualizing information, policy texts, observations and interviews" (p. 845). Ultimately, CPA involves questioning dominant narratives, interrogating the policy process, and explicating underlying patterns by empirically examining "semantic, sociocultural, and structural relations" (Morrow & Brown, 1994, p. 212).

Drawing on CPA, I used multiple methods and a variety of data sources to examine the dominant narrative surrounding New Orleans' post-Katrina "renaissance." My analysis explored how post-Katrina policy developed, the underlying theories of action, and how equity was framed versus how it was enacted. Further, I paid close attention to the role of social stratification on the stages of policy making and how power and race worked in tandem to create "winners" and "losers" in multiple arenas (i.e. housing and education).

**Site.** For this study, I purposefully selected New Orleans as the site in which to conduct my research because it would "provide information that is particularly relevant to [my] questions and goals" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). The devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina resulted in a

policy window (Kingdon, 1984), wherein actors from multiple levels of government and multiple sectors within society vied for control over the future of the city. Ultimately, those subscribing to the neoliberal paradigm won out, experimenting with policy designs in the economy, housing, and education. New Orleans thus provides an opportunity for researchers to understand the relationship between urban renewal and education reform, the equity implications of neoliberal policy design, and the role that race and power plays in the policy-making process. The residents of New Orleans have endured much pain, trauma, and instability, making the study of this "experiment" all the more imperative.

At its core, qualitative research is about "immersing oneself in a scene and trying to make sense of it" (Tracy, 2019, p. 3). Accordingly, as part of my fieldwork, I moved to New Orleans for two months with my family to immerse myself in the city's history, culture, and politics. I chose to concentrate my data collection in this way, rather than make multiple short visits, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the city and its reforms. The Uptown apartment I rented was owned by a black, native New Orleanian family who lived in the house just above us. They had generational roots in the city and were deeply connected with the political class. One of them served on the board of a charter school for a number of years. The area in which I lived was at the nexus of Central City, Uptown, and Freret (one of the neighborhoods that has rapidly gentrified since 2005). Walking five minutes in any direction, I could see the drastically disparate conditions that existed from block to block. I was also in the middle of largest geographic concentration of charter schools in the city. Aside from my immediate neighborhood, I took the time to explore all parts of the city, trying to take-in as much as possible. Being immersed in the daily routines, politics, and happenings of New Orleans gave me a much deeper understanding of the place, afforded the opportunity to engage in casual conversations around

my research and hone the type of questions I wanted to ask during interviews (Tracy, 2019). In order to collect and make sense of what I saw and heard day-by-day I kept a notebook of memos that both described what I saw and made connections to my research and existing literature.

**Sample.** In order to deeply interrogate the equity implications of the policy process in post-Katrina New Orleans, I employed multiple modes of data collection and analysis. CPA recognizes three stages of the policy process: problem definition, policy process, and policy implementation (Horsford, et al., 2019). The table below describes the type of questions a critical policy scholar might ask regarding the stages of policy making. These questions are intended to problematize how policy is typically studied and evaluated, an approach that compliments my use of non-traditional measures to better assess policy outcomes.

Table 3

*CPA Phases of Policy-Making*

| **Phase** | **Definition** | **CPA Questions** |
|---|---|---|
| *Problem Definition* | identification and framing of issue/s to be addressed with policy action | How is the problem or issue described and framed? Who is framing the issue? What "counts" as a problem? |
| *Policy Process* | development of policy solutions | Where is the policy solution being proposed? Who is proposing the policy solution? What form does the policy take? Between whom are policy negotiations taking place? What power dynamics are at play in the policy and legislative process? |
| *Policy Implementation* | enaction, formalization, or codification of policy and policy outcomes | What does the policy say and intend? Who is enacting the policy? What are the (un)intended outcomes of the policy? How does the policy affect disenfranchised populations? |

***Documents.*** To investigate these stages of the policy process in post-Katrina New Orleans I relied on a variety documents, including: formal policy recommendations, speeches and public commentary, enacted laws and executive orders, newspaper coverage, reports, memoirs, and raw data from the U.S. Census. The primary documents I collected (speeches and the final reports/presentations of the Bring New Orleans Back Committees) captured the policy making process and public rationale at the time of policy formation. I also collected documents, like newspaper articles, memoirs, and reports at key points in time: the policy formation phase (immediate year following Katrina) and the implementation phase (the 10-12 years following Katrina). To understand how the policy problems were defined, and later, how the outcomes were viewed, I collected articles from a sample of the most widely read national publications (New York Times, Wall Street Journal, National Review, Washington Post) and local newspapers (New Orleans Picayune, The Lens, The Advocate New Orleans Tribune). Further, all the data collection and analysis focused on the case subunits: the economy, housing, education.

***Secondary Data.*** In order to track and assess the ways in which New Orleans changed pre-and-post Katrina, I relied on data from the U.S. Census and the American Community Survey 5-year Estimates. Specifically, I analyzed population, poverty, and educational attainment by race and explored changes over time. I pulled data from the census tract level and then aggregated it at the neighborhood level, using crosstabs provided by the Data Center of New Orleans. I used these data to create descriptive tables and maps, tracking the association between policies and the changing demographics of communities and neighborhoods within New Orleans.

***Participants.*** Initially, I intended to interview twenty or more parents as part of my data collection. When I was in New Orleans, I attended school board and community meetings in an attempt to recruit parents. However, when I witnessed the pain and emotional trauma many

parents were experiencing, I decided not to approach them. As an advocate for equity and justice, I committed to doing research that adhered to principles of decoloniality (Patel, 2015). This meant that my role as a researcher did not grant me a privileged position in which my needs superseded those from whom I hoped to learn (Tuck & Guishard, 2013). Because I did not live in the city and could not offer much in return, I decided I could not further impose on the black community by asking for their participation in a research study, especially considering one the most frequent complaints was that the community was being experimented on. Instead, through a few unrelated contacts who lived in New Orleans, I was able to snowball sample a smaller subset of parents who were given information about my research and my contact information and could choose to reach out and participate (n=7). The parent interviews were rich and compelling but did not capture the full picture. To gain a deeper understanding of the reforms and how equity was viewed and enacted at the local level, I needed to hear other stakeholders' perspectives. As a result, I decided to talk to school administrators and board members (n=4), and community stakeholders (n=6). I recruited school administrators and OPSB board members through direct emails. I attempted to speak to at least one school leader that was representative of four different types of charters, a standalone, a "no excuses" model, a selective-enrollment charter, and a local CMO. The administrators I spoke to represented three of the four categories, I was unable to find an administrator of a local CMO who was willing to participate. I also attempted to speak to all of the OPSB board members, however only two volunteered to participate.

***Observations.*** To gain different perspectives on school reform in New Orleans, I sampled various events and meetings. I attended school board meetings to observe the interaction between parents and their elected representatives, to view first-hand the democratic process, and to witness the type of agency exercised by parents and community members.

Table 4

*Summary of Participant Characteristics*

| Characteristics | Total | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | | |
| Male | 7 | 58% |
| Female | 5 | 42% |
| **Race/Ethnicity** | | |
| Black | 7 | 58% |
| Hispanic/Latinx | 4 | 33% |
| White | 1 | 08% |
| **New Orleans Native** | | |
| Yes | 7 | 58% |
| No | 5 | 42% |

Table 5

*Study Participants by Role*

| Role | Gender | Race/Ethnicity | New Orleans Native | Number of Children |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Parent** | Female | Hispanic | Yes | 2 |
| | Female | Black | Yes | 2 |
| | Female | Black | Yes | 2 |
| | Female | Black | Yes | 1 |
| | Female | Black | Yes | 2 |
| | Female | White | No (long term resident) | 2 |
| | Male | White | No (long term resident) | 4 |
| **School Leader** | Female | Black | Yes | NA |
| | Male | White | No | NA |
| **Board Member** | Male | White | No | NA |
| | Male | Black | No | NA |
| **Community Stakeholder** | Male | Black | Yes | NA |

Additionally, I observed how the board members reacted to criticisms and complaints. I also observed a forum hosted by the national board of the NAACP. This more formal hearing was one of a series in cities nationwide. The purpose was to hear directly from the community

about their experience with charter schools, and from the forums decide whether or not to adopt a motion for a moratorium on the expansion of charter schools (the NAACP ultimately voted to adopt the moratorium). The meeting was widely publicized and drew a large number of people from the New Orleans area, allowing me to hear the varied experiences of community members and witness the emotional hardship experiences by families.

Table 6.

*Data Selection by Phases of Policy-Making and Research Questions*

| **Document Type** | **Problem Definition RQ1, RQ2** | **Policy Process RQ1, RQ2** | **Policy Implementation RQ2, RQ3** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Newspaper Articles | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Speeches | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Commission Policy Recommendations | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Laws and Executive Orders | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Intermediary Institution Reports | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Books: Memoir and First-Hand Journalist Account | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Interviews | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Observations | | | ✓ |
| Demographic Census Data | ✓ | | ✓ |

While I was living in New Orleans, OPSB was considering closing its last five direct run schools. I attended meetings held by the district to discuss the decision to convert or shutter the

schools and explain the chartering process moving forward. In these, I saw how the district communicated their decision making process, how that messaging was received, and how that affected perceptions of transparency and trust within the school community. Finally, I attended a meeting hosted by a pro-charter group, in which education reformers and school leader presented information about the charter movement in New Orleans and then opened up the floor to discussion. Attending this meeting provided an alternative perspective and allowed me to observe the messaging adopted by charter school advocates in the city.

## Data Collection

Both case study and critical policy methodologies emphasize the use of multiple data collection techniques. For this study, data collection included primary documents (speeches, laws, policy recommendations), secondary documents (newspaper articles, books, reports), census data, interviews, and observations. These varied sources of data helped develop a rich understanding of context around policy reforms from the federal, state, and local level, provide text for discourse and content analysis, and served to help triangulate research findings.

**Documents and Data.** In investigating the policy formation and implementation I sought documents that could capture three phases of policy-making generally agreed upon by critical policy analysts: problem definition, policy process, and policy implementation (Horsford et al., 2019). In order to examine the policy context surrounding the post-Katrina reforms, gain insight into the theoretical underpinnings and rationales for the proposed reforms, capture problem framing, and conduct analyses regarding the focus on equity for vulnerable populations, I collected documents that were developed/delivered within a year of Hurricane Katrina. Specifically, I gathered documents published by the Bring New Orleans Back Commission and memoir written by one of the lead committee members. I also collected speeches or press

releases given by President George Bush, Governor Kathleen Blanco, and Mayor Ray Nagin in the weeks and months immediately following Katrina. Lastly, I included reports and briefs published with the intention of shaping the recovery effort in New Orleans, such as a series of policy papers from The Heritage Foundation and a special issue published by the Urban Institute.

For context and impacts, I collected newspaper articles that spanned the year 2005-2019. These articles were identified through a few different methods. I used Google news alerts, Lexis Nexus, and Twitter to gather articles on New Orleans economic development, housing, and education reform, in addition to retrospective articles published in 2015 looking at New Orleans' recovery ten years after the storm. I searched both widely read national publications as well as local papers, including: *Times-Picayune (Nola.com), The Advocate, The Lens, and the New Orleans Tribune.* Over the course of this dissertation, I amassed over 500 articles, and while I read nearly all of them, I cultivated representative samples from different time periods and newspapers to use directly in this dissertation.

**Interviews and Observations.** I conducted original data collection, including observations and interviews. This allowed me to examine the micro level, providing the appropriate data to assess the human experience of neoliberal reforms. Interviews and observations provide a narrative of the lived experience (Seidman, 2006), enriching and enhancing conclusions drawn from data analysis pertaining to the first research question.

To allow for some flexibility in experience, formal interviews were semi-structured, lasted sixty minutes, and were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded using a hybrid method—inductive and deductive codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I designed unique protocols for each type of participant (parent, community stakeholder, administrator and board member, see Appendix A). The questions were designed to elicit participants' conceptions of community and

the role schools play in strengthening or weakening community, perceptions of and relationships with school personnel and culture, level of engagement with and capacity to fully participate in the system, sense of individual agency and "agentic power" (Campbell, 2009; Pattillo, 2015), and physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

All of the parent, school board, and administrator interviews were formal and recorded. One community stakeholder interview was formal, while the other five were informal. Initially, the informal interviews were a way to gather additional context about the city, schools, and other related topics. During the conversations I took detailed notes, and afterwards wrote memos reflecting on what was discussed and making connections to prior research. Later on, as my research evolved from an interview-based study to a broader critical policy analysis, I revisited the memos with a slightly different lens and created new memos that captured interviewees concerns about equity within the system.

I attended four OPSB board meetings, one charter school forum hosted by the NAACP, two school-based meetings about turning the five remaining traditional public schools into charter schools, a meeting hosted by 504ward, a group established to "keep talented young professionals" in New Orleans, and met with a small group of parents and teacher who were fighting for public education in New Orleans. Through this group, I was also invited to join the NOLA for Public Ed Facebook group, allowing me to see posts and conversations around the charter school reforms. I recorded all of these meetings with a digital recorder, took field notes, and wrote memos reflecting on the experience.

## Data Analysis

**Documents and data.** To gain a deeper understanding of the policy process, I conducted multiple readings of the collected documents. During the first read-through, I wrote memos that

described the context and politics of post-Katrina New Orleans. In the second read-through, I conducted a content analysis, coding for general themes that emerged around notions of equity, specific policy proposals, commonalities and differences in tone and context across policy document and speeches. In the third read-through I coded for rhetoric and policy ideas based on neoliberal values [entrepreneurialism, public-private partnerships, privatization, competition, creation of market/marketplace, choice, autonomy, rising tide metaphors/better "economy" leads to better outcomes for all]. In the fourth reading, I sought concepts derived from CPA and critical race theory, specifically mentions of words phrases "equity/equality", "race/racism", "minority", "black/African American", "justice/social justice", and concepts from my conceptual framework "mobility/opportunity", "agency", "well-being", and "trust". In each of these phases I kept detailed memos that outlined findings for each document and kept a running memo that aggregated data from across documents.

**Interviews and observations.** The interview data was coded in Dedoose following a hybrid process (Miles et al., 2014), where I generated codes (see Codebook in Appendix E) derived from my conceptual framework and critical policy analysis. Given that interview data is rich, I also created data-driven codes that captured values, emotions, and processes reflected in the participants' descriptions. After coding each interview, I wrote a detailed memo to summarize each participant's perspectives and experiences. To make sense of the coded data, I sorted and analyzed the excerpts in Excel, first seeking common experiences among participants, and then searching for outliers or unique perspectives. This process involved condensing a matrix of codes and excerpts into thematic findings addressing the relevant research questions (R2 and R3).

Table 7.

*Conceptual Framework and Data Analysis*

| Domain | Concepts |
|---|---|
| *Mobility and Opportunity* | Aspirations, match/mismatch in aspirations and experience of school system, perception of attainable mobility, belief in educational philosophy |
| *Agency* | Individual agency vs. agentic power, weak vs. strong empowerment, sense of control, inclusion |
| *Trust* | Perception of truthfulness, clarity around system operations, positive/negative interactions with institution representatives |
| *Well-being* | Sense of support vs. isolation, stress and anxiety vs. satisfaction, perception of capacity to navigate the system, perception of being valued vs. silenced or ignored |

## Limitations of Study Design

As with all research, this study has certain limitations. Because I am focusing on New Orleans, a unique case, and purposefully sampling, the findings are unlikely to be generalizable to other populations. However, because New Orleans promotes itself as a model to be replicated (Hassel, Brinson, Boast, & Kingsland, 2012), the findings can impact policy in other cities considering similar reforms, and within New Orleans. Another limitation is both the number of participants and their class-status. All parents were middle-class, and therefore could not speak directly to the experience of more vulnerable families. At the same time, because my participants have greater resources at their disposal, I was able to extrapolate the ways in which their experience might differ from those with fewer resources.

## CHAPTER 4: EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IS NOT EQUITY

*“Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or overactivity of repressive states.” (Sen, 1999, p.3)*

*"If we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others--for their use and to our detriment." (Lorde, 2007, p. 45)*

In a 2015 speech delivered to the National Press Club, Mayor Mitch Landrieu emphatically pronounced that ten years after the horror and destruction of Hurricane Katrina New Orleans was “America’s come back city” (Landrieu, Speech, 2015). The speech was billed as an insider’s account of New Orleans’ success with urban renewal and economic recovery, in which the lessons imparted by the Mayor could provide a model for other cities seeking to boost their economies. The picture painted by Landrieu was nothing short of glowing. New Orleans, he explained:

> has gone from literally being under water to being one of the fastest growing major cities in America, with thousands of new jobs, new industries, rapidly improving schools, rising property values and a new, stronger flood protection that will reduce the risk from future hurricanes. Our city has stood back up and this comeback is one of the world’s most remarkable stories of tragedy and triumph, resurrection and redemption. (Landrieu, 2015, p. 4)

As the speech progressed, he went on to spend six paragraphs—more than on any other topic in this speech—exclusively talking about the "remarkable progress" of New Orleans' reformed school system "defined by choice, defined by equity, defined by accountability" (Landrieu, 2015, p. 5). This rhetorical choice speaks to the highly intertwined nature of school reform and urban renewal in both the city's strategy and narrative about its revival. These rosy descriptions,

however, only tell part of the story. While New Orleans has experienced a "renewal," I argue that the benefits accrued unevenly and often times at the expense (both intentionally and unintentionally) of the city's black population. In this chapter, I use the tools of critical policy analysis to question the dominant narrative of New Orleans' post-Katrina recovery, and through document analysis examine the theories of action and underlying policies that drove it. My analysis is grounded in the social, cultural, political, and economic forces that shape the dynamics of power, wealth, and race in urban spaces (Grace, 1984; Rury & Mirel 1997). In particular, I explore the connection between urban development and school reform. My analysis shows how the policies undergirding the two worked in concert to disempower New Orleans' black and lower-income communities. In this chapter, I ask: *How does the introduction of a charter- or choice-centric school system fit into the larger project of the "redevelopment" of a city?* My analysis also examines whether and how policy projects grounded in market ideology are capable of promoting racial equity.

Most educational scholars who have studied New Orleans from a critical perspective, including Buras (2010, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016), Dixson (2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b), and Henry Jr. (2019), attend to the deep racial tensions and systemic inequality that led to the chartering of schools in New Orleans, and provide insightful and important counter narratives of the subsequent community resistance to such reforms. This work, though, typically centers around education—what is happening with teachers, students and families in relationship to school reform. In this chapter, I argue that education reform in New Orleans must be considered in conjunction with the federal, state, and local policies and politics intended to usher in a "New American City" and a whiter, less poor New Orleans (Cooper, 2005; Herbert, 2006; Rivlin 2015). To do so, I begin with a brief history of New Orleans, with special attention paid to

race. I then provide a brief overview of the state of New Orleans pre-Katrina, before diving into the analysis of the post-storm policies.

## Race, Education, and Politics in New Orleans– A Brief History

### Pre-Civil War New Orleans

Founded in 1718, New Orleans was a diverse, bustling, port city, built upon the cultures of France, Spain, Africa, and the Caribbean. Its location in the Deep South and proximity to the Gulf and Mississippi helped it grow into the largest slave port in the United States. Just as other states and cities across the cotton belt, New Orleans was built, and is profoundly shaped, by the institution of slavery (Gehman, 1994). Slavery's legacy—white supremacy, segregation, and racism—touches every aspect of life in New Orleans from geography and neighborhood zoning to access to quality jobs and education. At the same time, New Orleans was unique. It had the largest free black population in America (Wall, et. al, 2002). Both slaves and free people of color in New Orleans also had a history of defiance and uprisings when they felt their rights were being infringed upon.

### Reconstruction

Public education began in earnest in the state following the Civil War, though it had been firmly established for white families in New Orleans since 1841 (DeVore & Logsdon, 1991). During the war however, black refugees demanded access to education for themselves and their children. Under Army rule, freedmen schools were set up in New Orleans and across the state. Immediately after the war ended there was a fierce battle in New Orleans between integrationists and the local school board, who tried to maintain segregated schools even though the newly ratified state constitution forbade it. For a short time between 1870 to 1877, schools in New Orleans were integrated (DeVore & Logsdon, 1991), though white families in majority black

parishes outside the city kept their kids at home, while majority white parishes barred black children from attending their schools (Wall, et. al, 2002).

Political, economic, and civic freedoms expanded for black Louisianans during the period of Reconstruction, but they were met with massive resistance at every turn. The white, former Confederate, Democratic-party aligned population of Louisiana was in open rebellion throughout Reconstruction, mounting massive campaigns of intimidation and terrorism (Wall, et. al, 2002). The federal government eventually capitulated to these groups, pulling federal troops out of the South, effectively ending Reconstruction and allowing the Democrats and white Redeemers to swoop in and take back power from Republicans, who had defended the fragile, though constitutionally protected, rights of blacks. The Civil War, then, did not "produce a revolution in Louisiana: the same people who had controlled the state before the war, the planters in the country and the merchants, bankers, and brokers of New Orleans, still controlled the state after the long years of war and Reconstruction" (Wall, et. al, 2002, p. 214).

**Jim Crow and Civil Rights Era**

New Orleans's experiment with a strong system of public schools and within that system, integration, faltered under and decades of political leadership disinterested in public education and hell bent on maintaining a separate and unequal system for black citizens. In the nearly100 years that followed Reconstruction, black Americans were systematically and overtly denied their constitutional rights, access to land and wealth, a fully and equally funded system of education. This is true of the black citizens of New Orleans too, though their resistance to being reduced to an inferior status—exemplified by Homer Plessy's refusal to accept segregation—slowed the pace at which they lost their civil rights and privileges (DeVore & Logsdon, 1991). However, by 1900, the state legislators, the Redeemers, implemented full-fledged segregation

and disenfranchisement lowering the number of black registered voters from 130,344 in 1879 to 1,342 in 1904. From the late 1800s through the 1950s Louisiana developed a deeply entrenched system of racial segregation that effectively denied blacks any real opportunity to become equal citizens in society, and just as importantly, to amass any forms of wealth.

It should come as no surprise, then, that legislators across Louisiana resisted the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. It took six years for the New Orleans School Board, in defiance of the state, but heeding federal mandates, to implement the limited desegregation plan in which Ruby Bridges and a handful of other little black girls first desegregated white schools in New Orleans. The legal blows of the civil rights era further accelerated white flight out of the city. This exacerbated "de facto" segregation that already existed within New Orleans and across the country spurred on by “racially explicit policies of federal, state, and local governments [that] defined where whites and African Americans should live” (Rothstein, 2017, p.vii). Policies such as red lining, zoning, restrictive covenants, segregated public housing, urban renewal, and federally subsidized mortgages promoting white flight to the suburbs, deepened spatial segregation and inequity in New Orleans. One such consequence was that the black community often occupied land in areas at much higher risk of flooding, another being the severely diminished ability to own property, the primary means of accumulating wealth in America. This discrimination in the housing market accounts for a great deal of the disparities that persist between black and white Americans across the nation, and particularly in New Orleans.

Despite the white flight and battles over segregation, in the late 1960s and early 1970s Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs ushered in an era in which federal investment in the city and focus on grassroots community development led to optimism and a civic renaissance in New Orleans (Germany, 2007). The election of Moon Landrieu, "a young white liberal with a

history of opposing segregation and supporting federal social policies," demonstrated "that black votes, black political activism, biracial cooperation, and Great Society programs could remake electoral and bureaucratic power" (Germany, 2007, p. 247). Landrieu was responsible for appointing an unpresented number of black leaders and constituents to serve at the city level and pushed for a racial unity and equality in New Orleans. The city experienced an economic upturn due to Landrieu's focus on transforming the downtown, adding bridges and expressways, and building the Superdome (Germany, 2007). The 1978 election of Ernest "Dutch" Morial, New Orleans' first black mayor, was momentous; 76 percent of the black electorate turned out to vote (Rivlin, 2015). Under his tenure, black-owned businesses went from $17,000 in contracts to $11 million (Rivlin, 2015). His two terms as mayor, however, coincided with fading federal support for cities as Ford began and Reagan completely dismantled the Great Society. For example, in his second term Reagan cut the HUD budget by 40 percent, severely hampering cities' ability to pay for public housing. These federal policies, along with an economic downturn in the oil industry, occurred alongside a thirty-year period of black majority rule in the city. So, while black leaders gained control of city politics and the electorate turned majority black, disinvestment at the state and federal level and a diminished tax base from white-flight handcuffed initiatives to improve New Orleans and led to an urban crisis similar to other cities across the county. The long history of slavery; racism; political, economic, civic, housing, and educational discrimination all shaped the unequal landscape of New Orleans on the eve of Hurricane Katrina. It not only set the stage for the devastating impact of the hurricane on the black community, but also points to why and how racial struggles for power and control of the city, along with a persistent undertone of a belief in racial and cultural superiority shaped the recovery.

**Geography of Inequality Before the Storm**

On the eve of Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, like many other major cities across the United States, had been steadily losing its population, and for at least twenty-five years had been a majority black city.

Table 8.

*New Orleans Population 1960-2000*

| Year | Population | Loss/Gain | % Black |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1960 | 627,525 | | 37% |
| 1970 | 593,471 | -34,054 | 45% |
| 1980 | 557,515 | -35,956 | 55% |
| 1990 | 496,938 | -60,577 | 61% |
| 2000 | 484,674 | -12,264 | 67% |

Source: US Census, ACS Data

In 2000, as Figure 2 shows, New Orleans was largely segregated by neighborhood. Majority white neighborhoods tended to cluster around the bend in the Mississippi and then curve upward to the west, and black neighborhoods filled in the center and moved east. Of the twenty-three majority white neighborhoods, twelve (52%) were more than 70% white, while thirty-five of the fifty-one (69%) majority black neighborhoods were more than 70% black. The comparison between settlement patterns from the year 2000 to the Redlining Map in Figure 1, highlights precisely the impact of those discriminatory housing policies. In addition, the areas in which black families were forced to live were located on lower ground more prone to flooding (Seicshnaydre, Collins, Hill & Ciardulla, 2018), and therefore of lower property value and higher risk for investment.

Prior to the storm, only 32 percent of black households owned homes, while just over 100,000, or approximately 68 percent rented. Comparatively, 55 percent of white households

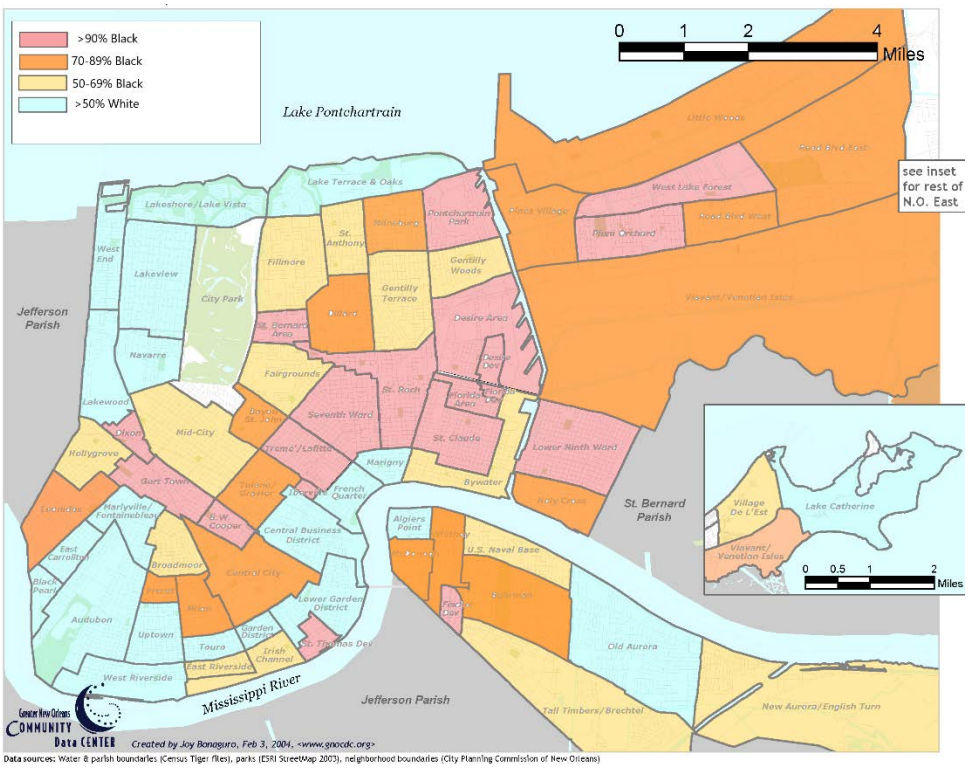


*Figure 4.* 2000 Black and White Population Ranges

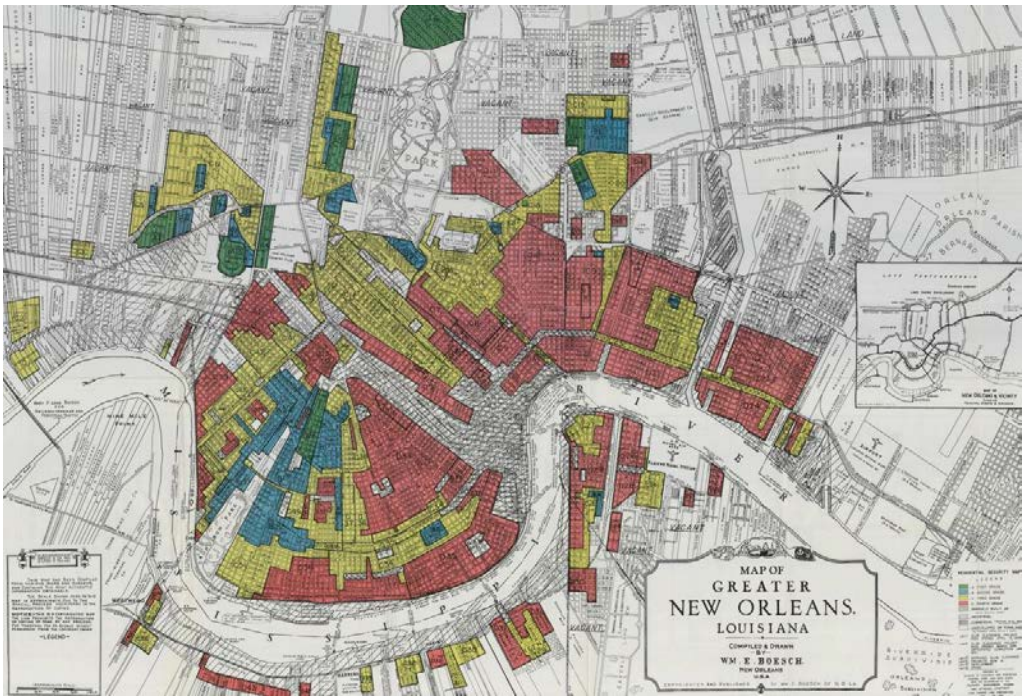


*Figure 5*. HOLC Redlining Map. Adapted from "Mapping Inequality," by Nelson, R.K., Winling, L., Marciano, R., Connolly, N., et al., *American Panorama*, ed. Retrieved from https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=12/29.954/-90.119&city=new-orleans-la&area=D35

were homeowners (U.S. Census, 2000a). The Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) operated 8,421 public housing units and 9,560 vouchers, but 47 percent of the public housing units were vacant in 2005. Nearly 79 percent of the units were located in one of nine large housing projects that had suffered decades of neglect and mismanagement (Popkin, Turner, & Burt, 2006). Finally, 42 percent of renters in the city paid more than 30 percent of their household income on rent, surpassing the threshold for affordability (U.S. Census, 2000b). This geography of inequality shaped by the numerous forces outlined above, profoundly influenced the ways in which Katrina and the subsequent flooding affected resettlement after the storm. Inclusion of New Orleans history in this section is to emphasize that making policy without grappling with and accounting for the past, makes it impossible to formulate policies in service of a more equitable city or society.

## The City that Care Forgot, Again

After Katrina's landfall, televisions across the nation broadcast images of flooding so severe that parts of New Orleans looked like they had been completely washed away. Almost half of all New Orleans households had over four feet of floodwater in them (BNOB Executive Summary, 2006). The damage was devastating. Americans were also forced to take a hard, deep look at what inequality and racism looked like in 21st century America. The storm foisted upon the nation the images of poverty, desperation, and death at a scale many were happy to previously ignore (Alba, 2005; Sharkey, 2007). The shock and horror could have galvanized a movement insisting that the core of the recovery be a sustained and concerted effort to rectify centuries of discrimination and segregation. This is not what happened. Instead, as I show in the chapter below, policy makers and powerful non-governmental actors rebuilt the city on top of the same faulty foundations, and in the midst of making New Orleans "the best city in the world"

(BNOB Executive Summary, 2006, p. 3) with a "world-class public education system" (BNOB Education Report, 2006, p.1), they ushered in a new era of inequality.

## Post-Katrina Policy Landscape: Ode to Neoliberal Ideology

### Theory of Action - Trickle Down after the Flood

In the days and months following Katrina a flurry of policy decisions at the federal, state and local level cemented New Orleans' path towards a modern, neoliberal city. As my analysis of documents from that period shows, these decisions were shaped by conservative think tanks like the Heritage Foundation, and funded by private philanthropy from Gates, Broad, and other foundations (cite). On September 12, 2005, 14 days after the hurricane, the Heritage Foundation published its first of many reports filled with recommendations for rebuilding the Gulf Region and New Orleans in particular. My analysis of this report illuminated the authors' deep attachment to neoliberalism. The entire report was crafted around the notion that

1. "private entrepreneurial activity and vision, not bureaucratic government, must be the engine to rebuild" (Meese, Butler, & Holmes, 2005, p. 1).
2. This is best accomplished by "encourage[ing] creative and rapid private investment through incentives and reduced regulation" (Meese, et al., 2005, p. 1).
3. Channeling "long-term education, health, and other assistance directly to the people and areas affected" allows them to "control their future" (Meese, et al., 2005, p. 1).

In fact, in the six pages of text focused on "rebuilding communities and lives" (Meese, et al., 2005, p. 1), the authors suggest that regulations be eliminated, limited, simplified, suspended, or modified 17 separate times, and call for private sector investment and innovation, private organization, and private partnerships 21 times. The frequent use of these market-centered concepts signals an allegiance to traditional economic development and neoliberal policymaking.

The underlying theory of action supposes that bringing in developers, investors, and new business will attract better educated, higher salary residents, thereby growing the economy and strengthening the tax base which, in turn, will make available resources for a range of social and civic services. However, the trickle down process hinges upon the right balance being found between tax incentives and abatements (Eisinger, 1988).

Based on my analysis of speeches, policy documents, executive orders and legislation, the ideology articulated in this document is representative of theory of action held by policy actors and influencers at the federal, state and local level, permeating much of their coordinated policy approach to rebuilding New Orleans. For example, Bush, in his remarks at Jackson Square, noted "it is entrepreneurship that creates jobs and opportunity; it is entrepreneurship that helps break the cycle of poverty; and we will take the side of entrepreneurs as they lead the economic revival of the Gulf region" (Bush, 2005, p. 3). Kathleen Blanco, the governor of Louisiana, just months before Katrina touted her economic development agenda in a speech before the legislature. In it she pronounced, "Louisiana doesn't need more government. It needs better government ... and that's my goal. Much of what it takes to run this state and create jobs for our people does not require legislation. It requires ingenuity, integrity, and lots of hard work" (Blanco, 2005a, para 33-34). Further, she highlights tax incentives, tax credits, and a billion dollars in tax cuts for businesses. In her public remarks post-Katrina, the Governor was far more focused on the multitude of items that needed immediate attention, but demonstrated her continued commitment to these principals in her support for public-private partnerships (2005b) and in pushing through legislation for the state takeover and chartering of New Orleans public schools (2005c, 2005d), the details of which will be discussed in the next section.

Mayor Ray Nagin, finishing out his first term as Katrina hit, ran his 2002 campaign mocking the existing black political establishment, courting instead the old money, elite and powerful, white business class by running on eliminating the living-wage ordinance and the city's set-aside program for minority- and women-owned businesses (Rivlin, 2015). Less than a week after the storm, Nagin was summoned to Dallas to meet with over 52 members of the business council, largely populated by the same people who had backed his campaign. Observing this group swoop into the power vacuum, one New Orleans resident noted to a journalist, "you had this old-line economic elite reassert their position of dominance the moment the city flooded…it was like watching them revert to their original state" (as quoted in Rivlin, 2015, p. 59). Many members of this group were key in getting Nagin elected, and expected him to work with them to begin the rebuilding process immediately. One member, Jimmy Reiss, had just a few days earlier told a *Wall Street Journal Reporter:*

> Those who want to see this city rebuilt want to see it done in a completely different way: demographically, geographically and politically….I'm not just speaking for myself here. The way we've been living is not going to happen again, or we're out. (WSJ, 2005, para 9)

Another New Orleans business mogul, Joe Canizaro, called Nagin up during the Dallas meeting to pass on a message from Carl Rove. The Bush administration expected the Mayor to assemble a "blue-ribbon panel of business people and other community leaders" (Rivlin, 2015, p.87), before the federal government would commit billions of dollars to rebuilding the city. Canizaro, who had close ties to Bush administration, and who was a major real estate developer in the city, would ultimately take the lead on forming this blue-ribbon panel, what became known as the Bring New Orleans Back Commission (BNOB). The 17 person committee, though racially

balanced, was predominately male, had only one community activist, and was mostly filled with CEOs and bank presidents. J. Stephen Perry, head of the New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau remarked, "the importance of this group is that it will give the federal government the confidence that the city is harnessing the private sector to do a lot of its work" (as quoted in Rivlin, 2015, p. 138). Not surprisingly then, the BNOB Commission's approach to rebuilding New Orleans aligned with that of the Bush administration. Underlying their work, however, was a desire to remake New Orleans in their own image. So while most of New Orleans, especially black New Orleans, was dispersed throughout the country and reeling from the loss their homes, their possessions, their communities, and the lives of friends and families, this group of private actors, who mostly lived in a small concentrated area of the city and could afford private planes and security details (Rivlin, 2015), tasked themselves with deciding who should return, which homes and neighborhoods should be rebuilt, which communities should be razed and turned into green space, what kinds of schools and teachers students should have, and what the economic future of the city should look like without any democratic processes in place.

Finally, in all three policy making arenas, the city's the physical disaster was viewed as an opportunity to be seized upon, as it provided a political window (Kingdon, 1984) to institute sweeping policy changes that might otherwise be met with resistance and/or rejected when proposed under regular democratic processes. This last piece of the larger ideology driving the rebuilding of New Orleans is what Naomi Klein (2007) calls "disaster capitalism." In my analysis, I found that nearly every person involved in leading the effort framed their work this way. Governor Blanco, for example, remarked, “In some ways, these storms have given us opportunities to start anew and rise above the limitations of the past," (2005c, para 71). She is even more forceful when talking about reforming schools: "This is a once-in-a-lifetime

opportunity. We must not let it pass us by (Blanco, 2005d, para 36). Peppered throughout the speeches, documents, and interviews I analyzed, were the same phrases: remake, reimagine, build a better and bigger, build a different New Orleans. Scott Cowen, BNOB Commission member and the president of Tulane University, wrote,

> All of us (and I include myself, as chairman of the [BNOB] education committee) were engaged in reimagining the city from scratch. It was a like a SimCity scenario of postapocalyptic problem solving, only this was for real—this could change people's actual lives. Intentions, I believe, were good. To Ray's credit, he had the right instinct: Bring the strongest leaders and the best minds together to brainstorm their way to a Renaissance" (p. 38).

His reflection on the process truly captures the overarching philosophy and attitude guiding the recovery. As Cowen's quote illustrates these elite actors described post-Katrina New Orleans as a blank slate, which ignored the history of the city, and embodies settler colonialism: a logic of erasing to replace (Patel, 2015). They compared their efforts to a video game, stripping the humanity from the impacted communities and arguably showing themselves as emotionally removed from reality. He then described seeking the "best minds," but this excluded and devalued the black families who were not represented in this "reimagining." Further, he celebrates all of this being done outside the constraints of traditional democratic institutions. This callous retelling of New Orleans' rebuilding, in which depersonalized "intentions were good," conveys what is missing throughout the majority of planning and policy documents—any deep reflection on, or reckoning with, the causes of inequality in New Orleans and an attempt to rectify them with justice oriented policies.

**Double Speak and Big Talk - Where's the Equity?**

As I have argued, the general strategy for rebuilding New Orleans relied on market principles and therefore did not include race- or income-specific remedies. However, policy makers both upfront and upon reflection tried to link their plans to equity goals. This section examines the use of the concept of equity in speeches and policy documents. An analysis of the rhetoric and content in these documents provides a window into to the policy actors' definitions of equity and/or equality and whether those definitions are based on an understanding of the historical roots and systemic nature of inequality. The analysis is also a way to gauge the different actors' level of commitment to equity.

An examination of speeches and documents focused on the rebuilding of New Orleans show that policy actors, at a minimum, wanted to appear that they were committed to equity. As I will discuss next, the discussions of and plans around equity ranged from briefly acknowledging the history of racism and discrimination and the role that should play in recovery efforts, to merely emphasizing a vague equitable distribution of resources. None of the speeches or policy documents contained a detailed plan or explanation for achieving equity goals, and as the next sections will show, the policies ultimately implemented had profoundly negative consequences for equity in the city.

Somewhat surprisingly, only President Bush acknowledged the history of racism and discrimination in New Orleans. In his Jackson Square speech he noted, "As all of us saw on television, there's also some deep, persistent poverty in this region, as well. That poverty has roots in a history of racial discrimination, which cut off generations from the opportunity of America" (Bush, 2005, para 17). Further, he recognized the "duty to confront this poverty with bold action" (para 17). He follows these lines with calls for more minority-owned businesses,

more home ownership, and more local employment in new industries. To further these goals, he provides the following policy solutions: creating the Gulf Opportunity Zone, administering Workers Recovery Accounts ($5,000 to be used for education/training and child care), and passing the Urban Homesteading Act (allow federal land in the region to be used for low-income residents to build their own homes). While none of these policy solutions is explicitly focused on race, the latter two are equity focused based on income, and the housing proposal in particular could be seen as a federal response to government sponsored redlining. Unfortunately, only the Gulf Opportunity Zone passed through congress, providing $8 billion dollars in tax breaks and incentives to businesses building or rebuilding in the area. At the federal level, commitment to equity never moved beyond the rhetorical level.

The BNOBC's policy recommendations and Mayor Nagin's final report adapting those recommendations, shine a light on how very little attention was paid to equity, and at the same time how myopic those involved seemed to be about their commitment to equity. In his introductory letter to the final report, Nagin emphasized that "the plan prioritizes the citizens, investing in the skills, talents, experience, expertise and ambitions of New Orleanians, and *closing the gap between the "haves" and the "have nots" that has so characterized our city for decades*" (emphasis added, Nagin, 2006, n.p.). Scott Cowen, who wrote a book reflecting on the work of the BNOBC and developing crisis leadership skills, explained,

> Our job as civic leaders was to work with the difficult realities, including the realities of racial distrust, political dissension, and the traumatic effects of loss and dislocation. To be fair, the BNOB did try. A wealth of effort and a flood of words went into the documents issued by its various subcommittees. Every report—Health and Social Services, Culture, Education, even Urban Planning—included passionate language about equity, social

> justice, and the unique opportunity, post-Katrina, to solve all the inadequacies of a failing inner city. (Cowen, p. 38)

His comments demonstrate how he and others on the commission seemed to believe they were involved in project pushing for racial equity and social justice. Yet, my analysis of the Economic Development, Urban Planning, Education, and Cultural Committees' reports shows that there was very little emphasis on equity.

In the economic development plan, an eighty-four page document, equity was mentioned once. It appeared in a section on improving the healthcare sector, in which the committee called for the new system to "close racial gaps in health status and outcomes" by eliminating differentiated care based on race (2006, p. 37). While this is a commendable goal, the report did not elaborate on the underlying causes of health disparities among minorities, nor did it outline a plan for addressing them. The Urban Planning Committee never directly mentioned equity. They did, however, repeatedly use the word "equitable." Their vision for a "new New Orleans" was "a sustainable, environmentally safe, socially equitable community with a vibrant economy" (p. 3). The pages that followed this vision offered no definition of socially equitable, and every subsequent use of the word equitable (4 instances) described the "efficient and equitable" delivery of services to neighborhoods.

The Education Committee, unlike the others, was more focused on equity, but narrowly so, as they strictly focused on the provision of education in the new proposed system. Within the broader objective of ensuring learning and achievement for "all students regardless of race, socioeconomic class or where they live in New Orleans" (p. 25, 39, 47), there was a sub-goal of "Ensuring Equity" (p. 16). This entailed the following recommendations:

- ensure sound teacher student ratios

- provide all students with the ability to choose a school that best meets their needs,
- create a fair, rules-based system for placing students in their school of choice,
- allocate resources to schools using an equitable funding model where dollars follow students with appropriate weighted adjustments (p. 16)

Equity, to them, is about equal access to choice and a fair distribution of resources. Similarly, "equitable" was mentioned seven times in the fifty-four pages in one of two ways: equitable access to quality school options, or equitable funding or resource allocation and distribution.

Equally striking, is what was left out of these documents. Specifically, none of these reports made any direct reference to the black community. While the term “race” was used on occasion in the education committee report (four times), there was no mention of a particular race, or of the specific experience of schooling for black children in New Orleans. Instead, as is common in education reform, the language invokes color blindness, using phrases like "regardless of race" (p. 6, 25, 39, 47) and repeatedly emphasizing "all students" (17 times). In this way, the committee neglected to consider the history of why schools have underperformed and maintained the underlying belief that misguided governance and a failure to have a "relentless focus on learning and achievement" (p. 3) was the reason students were not achieving in the past.

Race was all but completely ignored in the three other committee documents, outside of the one line in the economic development report about racial health gaps. These reports never mentioned “race”, “racism”, “racial”, “minority”, “African American”, “Black” or “discrimination.” Further, the urban development report never discussed what was to be done for displaced renters and affordable housing occupants, the majority of whom were from the black community (something one would expect to see in a document detailing the rebuilding of

neighborhoods). Finally, the Culture Committee's report was entirely about attracting investment, luring the entertainment industry, and bringing back New Orleans' creatives to drive tourism. Neither equity nor race was a consideration, as the plan focused entirely on the economic benefit of rebuilding cultural institutions in New Orleans, all the while failing to reference, even once, the purveyors of that culture or the deep historical roots to the black community in the city.

The BNOBC documents contained no race-based policy initiatives, a shocking finding given that New Orleans' was a majority black city for over three decades. In the hundreds of pages of these reports, there is a single reference to African American or black residents of New Orleans, and only as a descriptor for one the many festivals held in the city. As my document analysis shows, there was very little emphasis on racial equity in these documents. The common theme across documents was not how to bring back New Orleans' black population by planning for a better future with a well-coordinated plan on housing, jobs, health education, and supportive community. It was, instead, a push for rebranding the city as a successful, modern hub for innovation and entrepreneurialism, for getting the tourism industry back up and running, and for bringing in investment and growing the economy.

**The Trifecta - Economic Development, Housing, and Education Policy**

The previous two sections laid out the market ideologies undergirding policy creation in post-Katrina New Orleans, which raised questions about whether tackling inequity is even possible within a neoliberal policy frame. In this section, I further examine policy documents and enacted policies using the tenants of CPA. This analysis foregrounds the equity implications of the economic, housing, and education policies put in place post-Katrina.

**Economic Development.** The approaches to city renewal at the federal, state, and local level favored the already wealthy and brought outside investors, who were likely unconcerned,

or at least less concerned, with any form of economic, social, and political justice. President Bush and Congress followed through on his promise to declare a Gulf Opportunity Zone that would provide "immediate incentives for job-creating investment, tax relief for small businesses, incentives to companies that create jobs, and loans and loan guarantees for small businesses" (Bush, 2005, p. 3). Making this declaration provided substantial tax breaks for private developers from within and outside New Orleans, further incentivizing large firms with a lot of capital to take advantage of the depressed land values. Bush also suspended the Davis-Bacon Act in the opportunity zone. This law requires federal contractors to pay local prevailing wages. By suspending it, Bush again favored private firms over residents. The city of New Orleans also offered a slew of incentives and tax breaks to spur economic growth, their overwhelming priority. Not surprisingly the other committees saw their mission as linked to and in support of the city's economic development, as evidence by the Education Committee's "mission is to create an educational system that distinguishes New Orleans in a positive way, attracting both families and businesses to the city" (BNOBC, 2005, homepage).

Federal, state, and local policies decimated the black middle class. Bush's Treasury Secretary refused to ensure city municipal bonds, forcing Nagin to lay off 3,000 city employees, the majority of whom were black. The Small Business Administration rejected a majority of loan applications by local businesses and homeowners, and the Bush administration nixed a bill from Congress providing emergency bridge loans (Davis, 2006). The state decided to close Charity Hospital, a fixture of public medicine in the city, cutting thousands of unionized jobs (Rivlin, 2015). The state takeover of local schools and the subsequent defunding of the local school board led to the firing of 7000 teachers and school district employees, 75% of whom were black (Buras, 2015). The Federal government and the state also failed to ensure locals were employed

in rebuilding efforts, causing many to lose jobs to outsiders with more flexibility and resources (Davis, 2006).

**Housing.** Federal, state, and local authorities involved in rebuilding New Orleans did not focus on "rehousing the city's displaced low-income residents" (Mueller, Bell, Chang & Henneberger, 2012, p. 292). Instead, policies discouraged and made it harder for this population to return. The federal government continued to fund and support the Hope VI program, first started under President Clinton. The program provides funding for public housing transformation that includes, "changing the physical shape of public housing," "promoting mixed-income communities" and "forging partnerships with other agencies, local government, nonprofit organization, and private business." (Housing and Urban Development, 2019, n.p.). In practice, changing the "physical shape" of public housing meant demolishing the projects, which created fewer housing units for low-income families (Brown, 2016).

BNOBC, likely incentivized by the federal funding and spurred by the desire to remake New Orleans, recommended the "development of safe and viable mixed-income communities that include quality multi-family housing, affordable housing and housing to meet the needs of New Orleans senior citizens" (BNOB Committee Recommendations, 2006, p. 11). This is the only mention of affordable housing in the hundreds of pages of multiple reports and the only plan for rebuilding communities for renters to return to. The Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO), which had been under federal control since 2002, followed through with this vision. They kept the projects sealed off and closed for over a year, despite minimal storm damage, without providing a plan for their future. Finally, HANO announced that the Big Four housing projects (B.W. Cooper, C.J. Peete, Lafitte, and St. Bernard) would be demolished and replaced with mixed income housing (Sasser, 2006).

The Road Home Program, conceived at the state level and funded federally, disproportionately helped wealthier and whiter home owners rebuild, while renters were again neglected (cite). The program offered homeowners rebuilding grants determined by the lesser of either pre-storm value or the cost to rebuild, both after insurance. White homeowners, who generally had higher pre-storm values, received greater rewards than homeowners in predominately black neighborhoods. This was true even when homes were the same size and age, and the damage was similar. The Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center filed a lawsuit against HUD and the State of Louisiana alleging the grant formula was discriminatory and reinforced historic patterns of segregation and disinvestment. They settled for $62 million in 2011, too late for many black homeowners who decided not to return based on the original grant offers (Seicshnaydre & Collins, 2018).

**Education.** New Orleans schools, like many other urban districts, had been struggling for a number of years. Though they showed some improvement just before Katrina, most schools were performing far below the state average. When Katrina struck, school choice advocates and free-market conservatives saw the storm as an opportunity to try a full-scale experiment with charter schools. Table X shows the major changes to the system.

Bush's administration pushed this agenda ahead by promising $25 million for rebuilding schools in New Orleans, if those schools were charters. In order to make this happen, Governor Blanco called a special session to pass Act 35, allowing the state to takeover any school deemed "academically in crisis," a status redefined in this legislation to be any school falling under the state average accountability score, twenty points higher than in the previous legislation. The law passed all but thirteen schools into the newly created Recovery School District (RSD), to be overseen by the State Board of Education. The Governor's Executive Orders 58 and 79

suspended the requirement in the state's charter school laws that school faculty and parents need to approve a conversion of a public school into a charter school. The model adopted by the RSD adhered closely to the BNOB Education Committees' recommendation to build an "education network model," what is now more commonly known as a portfolio district. These legislative moves effectively stripped the entire school system away from the democratically elected school board and eliminated the democratic power held by each school community. With little desire or capacity to directly run New Orleans public schools (Hill, 2006), the state immediately sought out charter operators to takeover. Today, New Orleans is the only all charter school district in America. It was created largely without the consent or input of the families it is intended to serve. Both the process of creating the all-charter system and the way that it is structured have deep implications for equity, particularly in the black community, but also among any family sending their child to public school in New Orleans.

Table 9

*Description of Education in New Orleans Pre-and-Post Katrina*

| **Pre-Katrina** | **Post Katrina** |
|---|---|
| 115 schools run by local district and school board (New Orleans Public Schools [NOPS] and Orleans Parish School Board [OPSB]) | 13 schools run by OPSB, 102 taken over by the state and consolidated into the Recovery School District (RSD) |
| 8 charter schools exist in New Orleans, all 115 school within OPSB traditional public schools | By 2019, all schools (89) in New Orleans are charter schools and have returned to local control |
| Traditional public-school district model, centralized decision making for all schools within the district | Portfolio model, oversight over more than 38 individual charter districts, each with own privately selected school board |
| Majority of teachers, black, native to New Orleans, multiple years of experience | Influx of young, alternatively certified, white educators |
| Strong teachers’ union | Very little unionization |

## Conclusion

This chapter situates the reformation of New Orleans schools within the larger federal, state, and local policies and politics concerning the city, weaving in economic, political, and social context, and then examines specific policies and their attendant rhetoric to show how reforms packaged, genuinely or not, as striving for student success, civil rights, and equity may in fact have the opposite effect. The analysis of policy documents, speeches, and demographic data show that the politics of school reform are intricately tied to city, state, and federal politics—each playing off the other to reshape opportunity, political power, and equity within the city. Further, it is not only important to understand how these policies work in concert – but to also examine how the assumptions and theories underlying the plans have the capacity to work against equity. Even if, rhetorically, they seem to espouse a vison of greater equity and opportunity. Ultimately, foregrounding the market as the solution, along with the failure to acknowledge the history of racism and discrimination and consider its role in the present state of the city, precluded those on the committees with an equity agenda from achieving that goal. Market-centric approaches to policy making are unlikely to ever serve equity because they are ahistorical, subscribe to the fundamental belief that markets are fair, shun democratic institutions, and place the onus of responsibility on the individual.

Those with their hands on the levers of power post-Katrina planned to build a bigger and better New Orleans in which a transformed school system provided "equal opportunity for *all* students to attend great schools" (BNOB Education Committee, 2006, p. 11), thereby attracting more families to the city. Yet, the guidelines and policies both proposed and implemented not only failed to accomplish this mission, but harmed communities and further drove inequity in the process.

# CHAPTER 5: RENEWAL AS REPLACEMENT – DISEMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

*"No man can be truly free whose liberty is dependent upon the thought, feeling, and action of others, and who has himself no means in his own hands for guarding, protecting, defending, and maintaining that liberty." (Douglas, 1882, para 1).*

*“Clearly, it has been a myth that Black families do not value education, but also problematic is the societal overemphasis on the economic returns to education as the panacea to address socially established structural barriers of racial economic inclusion” (Hamilton & Darity, 2017, p. 70)*

Neoliberal economics has dominated the political arena since 1970s. Underlying this political consensus is the theory that marketized solutions are what is best for the economy, that markets are self-regulated, fair, and color-blind, and that markets reward those who work hard and take responsibility for themselves (Hamilton, 2019). There is a lack of attention to power, capital, and race in market-centric policies, which creates challenges for inclusive development and racial, social, and economic justice. As the previous chapter established, some free-market policy actors are either actively and purposefully maintaining racial and economic inequality, or are generally disinterested in serving equity outcomes—largely due to a belief that the market accomplishes fair sorting. At the same time, however, a significant portion of those who subscribe to market theory (especially in education) believe, or profess to believe, their work, reforms, and/or policy interventions serve the goal of increasing equity. This narrative is shaped by elite policy advocacy networks and is often misguided (Scott, 2013).

This chapter introduces a conceptual framing that elucidates how economic, housing, and education policies interact to compound inequalities in ways that are not apparent when each policy type is analyzed independently. First, at the macro level, I describe the mechanisms of the policy process for implementing market reforms and how the resultant economic, housing, and

education policy outcomes interacted to disempower black communities. Next, this chapter dives down to the micro level, into the charter-dominated school system that emerged out of Katrina (a mini-market model), to examine how various stakeholders (parents, principals, board members, and community members) in the city experience and/or promote equity in a market-based school system.

## Part I: All the D's

Much of the work critiquing neoliberal reform in America tracks the ways in which the ideology shapes policy and the resulting impact on marginalized communities. There is a distinct focus on profiteering and "accumulation by dispossession" (e.g. Buras, 2015; Harvey, 2007; Klein, 2007; Lipman, 2011), detailing how the interests of developers, entrepreneurs, and the monied elite function as the driver for decision making. Further, this research discusses the side effects of such decisions, ultimately concluding that capital interests are racialized, sidelining low-income people of color's interests, rights, and access to wealth. While this research attends to the complex policy ecology of neoliberal urban development, researchers have not yet posed a framework that captures the *processes* of how neoliberal policy-making disempowers communities. In other words, there is a conceptual gap in terms of how, exactly, neoliberal policies create racialized outcomes. Based on my analysis of urban restructuring and school reform in New Orleans, I developed such a model (depicted in Figure 7), highlighting how policy framing, implementation, and outcomes build off one another to reinforce inequality. The first part of this chapter elaborates on this model using the case of post-Katrina redevelopment in New Orleans. By comparing reforms at the city (housing) and the school district level we can see how the adoption of policies tied to market theory adhere to a common pattern that disempowers and diminishes the strength of communities.

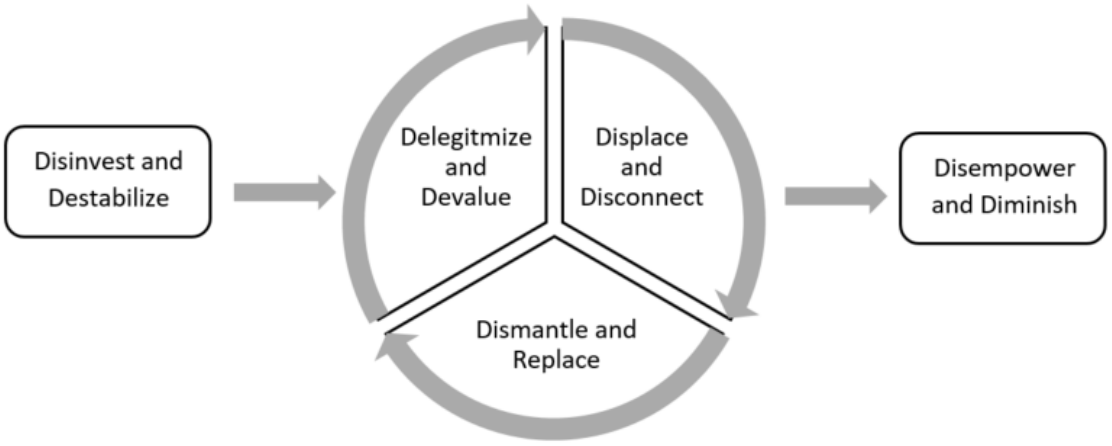


*Figure 6.* Mechanisms of Inequality in Neoliberal Policymaking.

**Disinvestment and Destabilization - A Precursor**

Wholescale neoliberal reforms are made possible by government policies and discriminatory preferences that encourage disinvestment, leading to a diminished tax base, a failing social safety net, and a depressed economy (Moskowitz, 2018; Scott & Holme, 2016). Disinvestment, then, renders communities vulnerable (Rothstein, 2017)—increasing the risk for multiple little, or one big shock to destabilize communities' institutions, social and emotional ties, community cultural wealth, and agentic capacity (Klein, 2007). In New Orleans the final shock was enormous. Two major hurricanes within a short time span, caused city-wide flooding on a massive scale, damaging homes and schools. However, other cities across the country, like Detroit, Chicago, Newark, Camden, and Philadelphia, find themselves in similarly destabilized environments due to the accumulative effect of smaller shocks, deindustrialization, recession, predatory lending, mass incarceration, poverty, etc. School districts experience much of the same. Disinvestment leads to destabilization through crumbling infrastructure, layers of increased accountability pressures, corrupt governance, difficulty maintaining a large talent pool,

and declining enrollment. The result, is a dearth of resources to adequately serve the needs of impoverished students, creating a situation that is ripe for takeover (Morel, 2018).

As most New Orleans residents were reeling from the devastation of Katrina, a policy window opened, and akin to Klein's (2007) shock doctrine, those with power rushed to usher in a neoliberal agenda for rebuilding the city. In this chapter, I argue that the infusion of free-market policy fixes, both ahistorical and colorblind, were made feasible through simultaneous acts of policy framing, implementation, and outcomes that delegitimize and devalue; displace and dislocate; and dismantle and replace public institutions and communities of color, ultimately leading to disempowerment via a racialized political project under the guise of good economic policy.

**Disinvestment in New Orleans.** As detailed in the previous chapter, New Orleans followed a similar pattern to other cities across the country in which government policies like redlining and federally subsidized white growth in the suburbs, ensured by restrictive covenants and zoning, gutted the middle class and led to severe segregation (Seicshnaydre, et al, 2018). Investment, along with the white middle class left the city, and the diminished tax base and faltering economy led to cuts in government spending, in key areas like education (Moscowitz, 2018). Economically, low wage service jobs, stabilized and bolstered by the tourism industry, were disproportionately high, leading in part to total family income that was 67% of the U.S. average (Zedlewski, 2006). 38% of children under the age of 18 lived in poverty, twice the national average, while over one-third of the black population lived in poverty (Zedlewski, 2006). At the same time, Louisiana ranked 42 out of 50 for per pupil expenditures (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003), which suggests that they lacked the resources needed to properly serve the children in the education system.

**Displace and Disconnect**

Years of disinvestment combined with the catastrophic effects of Katrina created optimal conditions for the elite and business class, embodied by the members of the BNOB Commission, to take charge of rebuilding the city. As I describe next, their plans for a “new New Orleans” hinged upon displacing, and therefore disconnecting, communities from publicly administered services like public housing and schools, so market-based, public-private options could be offered instead.

**Housing.** Ten months after Katrina, eighty percent or more of public housing remained closed. Six of the ten largest housing developments, which experienced minimal damage from the storm, were shuttered with no information about a plan to reopen them (Sasser, 2006). As one New Orleans lawyer who represented the tenants noted, "While the purpose of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is to get people into housing, since Katrina they have acted to keep people out. The Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) has laid off a huge portion of their maintenance staff and focused on fencing off properties" (as quoted in Sasser, 2006, p. 1). Activists and tenants’ rights groups fought, protested, and sued to gain access to these facilities in which tenants still had lease agreements. Power in numbers, however, was not in their favor as many former tenants remained dispersed throughout the country. Fear among those protesting the closure and hoping to return to their homes was that government officials and business leaders were secretly planning to demolish the projects and privatize public housing (Sasser, 2006). The model they pointed to, River Garden in the St. Thomas neighborhood, replaced 1,500 public housing units, with 1,600 new apartments where only 120 were designated for public housing, and only 40 were actually occupied by low-income tenants. Not surprisingly, in this neighborhood the population has shifted dramatically. According to my analysis of census data,

between 2000 and 2017, the population with a Bachelor's degree or higher increased by 38%, while the black population decreased by 36.5%. Protesters and residents piled into HANO meetings, continued to demand re-entry and at the very least a schedule for reopening. HANO officials demurred and said they would need 12-18 months to develop a plan, an eternity for the displaced and those living in temporary housing (Sasser, 2006). Ultimately, the tenants' fears proved to be warranted. In 2008, all four of the biggest housing projects were slated for demolition and subsequently replaced with privately run, mixed income housing developments (Reckdahl, 2012).

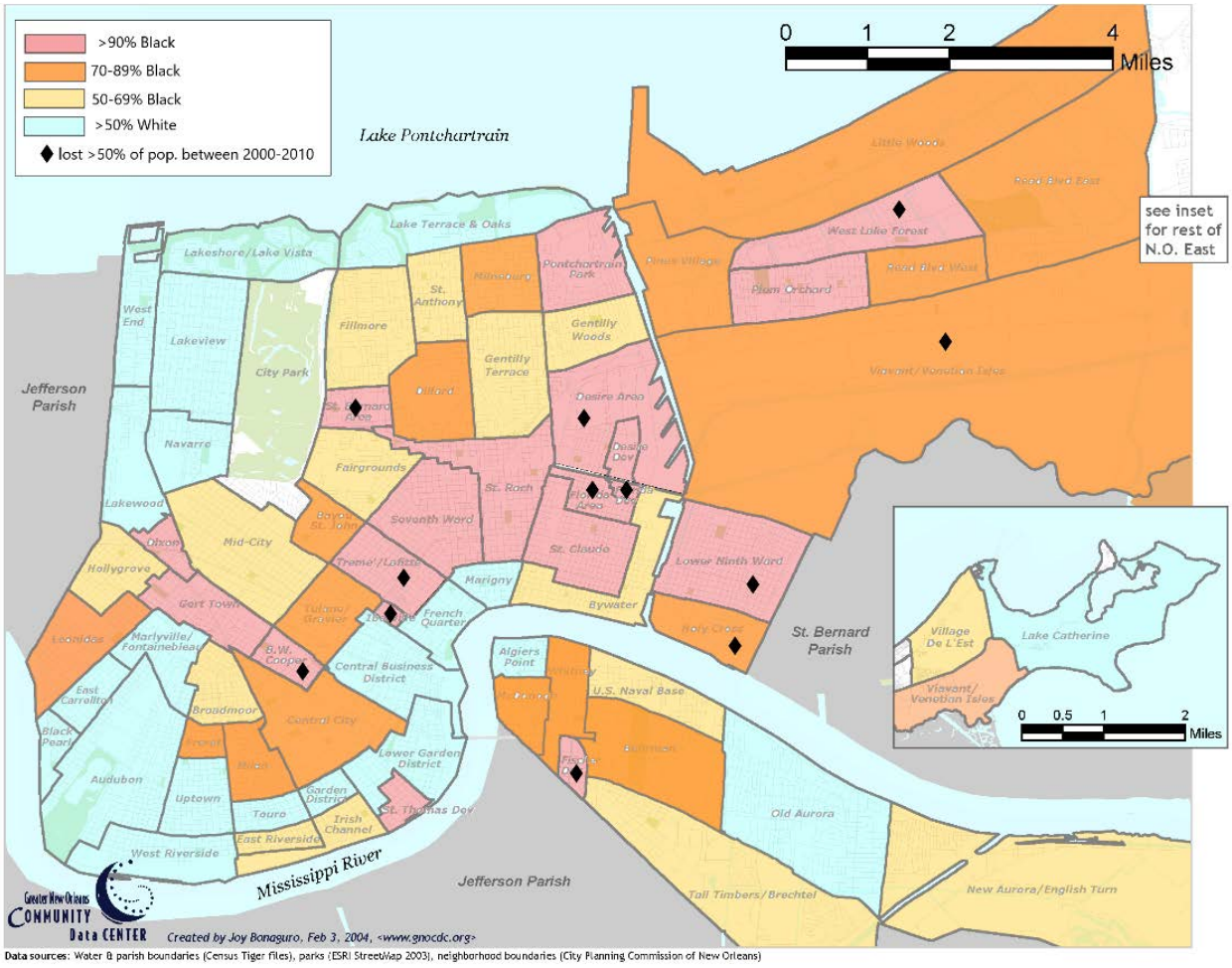


*Figure 7.* Post-Katrina Population Loss Greater than 50% by 2010, layered on 2000 racial make-up of city. Base map adapted from Greater New Orleans Community Data Center. Map visualization created by author based on U.S. Census (2000, 2010) data.

The failure to attend to displaced renters, the discriminatory nature of the Road Home Program (as discussed in the previous chapter), and a concerted effort to stall the redevelopment of poorer black neighborhoods locked black New Orleanians out of the city and out of the rebuilding process. Based on my analysis of ACS and Census data, between 2000 and 2010, 66% of majority black neighborhoods lost a quarter of their residents, while 59% of white neighborhoods either gained residents or lost 5% or fewer. Nearly a quarter (24%) of majority black neighborhoods lost greater than 50% of their population in that time. Though some neighborhoods increased their population by 2017, more than half (52%) of neighborhoods that had been majority black before Katrina sustained a twenty-five percent loss or greater in their population. The decisions to alter the racial and socio-economic make-up of future of communities and neighborhoods through housing policies that prioritized white homeowners and incentivized market rate, mixed income properties intended to attract the young, creative class, embody policymaking that centered technocratic fixes over people. Entire communities were deemed expendable.

**Schools.** Unlike the housing projects, many of the school buildings in New Orleans experienced significant damage from the storm (Klein, 2015). Katrina also dispersed school-attending families across the nation, and as explained previously, no real attempts were made to help bring them home. As a result, rebuilding the school system proved a difficult task. Years of struggling public schools, like with public housing, provided leverage for those in power who viewed the displacement of families as an opportunity to rebuild the city's institutions differently (Morel, 2018). For the schools, this meant a state takeover that largely adhered to the principles laid out by the BNOB Education Committee, which recommended a portfolio style district that

was all choice and mostly charter. At the school system level, then, displacement and disconnection happened in layers and over time. Families were displaced by the storm, then 7,000 teachers and other public school employees—the majority of whom were black, middle and working class—were displaced via a mass firing due to budget constraints.

The state takeover established under Act 35, in the form of the Recovery School District (RSD), disconnected the public school system from local governance—literally and geographically, as the RSD was based out of Baton Rouge (80 miles away)—and disconnected schools from neighborhood communities by removing attendance zones. Act 35 constituted "a taking" (Community stakeholder, interview). Schools were removed from the control of the local school board and eventually the state elected school board and put in the hands of privately-run charter operators. Act 35 also changed the cut-off score for a failing school from 60 to 87.4, shifting 107 schools (nearly all) to RSD control. The decision to charter the majority of schools further disconnected communities, by adding multiple layers of governance: non-democratically appointed charter boards, the RSD Board with one representative from New Orleans, and, for out-of-state CMO's, national boards—none of which typically contain members from the same communities as the families being served by the school. The complex nature of governance in New Orleans is best illustrated by looking at the most recent publication of the Cowen Center's Governance Chart (Figure 8). Even though all schools are now back under OPSB control, slightly simplifying governance, there are still 38 operators, which each manage between one and seven schools. Additionally, in the last year, five new schools have opened, while seven others have closed.

Prior to the passage of Act 35 Governor Blanco Governor Blanco also issued two Executive Orders (58 and 79) in the immediate aftermath of Katrina, stripping from charter law

the requirement that families and educators vote on whether their school is transformed into a charter school, thereby removing one of the only channels for community input into the chartering of schools. This move eradicated provisions that ensured charter schools remained democratic and responsive to key community stakeholders: students, parents, and educators (Henry Jr., 2016). A school leader and New Orleans native I spoke with captured the impact on neighborhoods and communities when she commented:

> [this education reform movement] has now created or broken down or trashed the sense of community that you once had with your external community and the school that you attended. So because kids from all over the city can attend any school within the city, there's no ties to the neighborhoods. You know, your kids can't walk to school with the people from down the street because they probably don't go to the same school. And you don't play with the children around the corner because you don't know them because you don't go to school with them anymore. So that whole sense of community that extended beyond the school grounds, I really think it's taken a beating from parents having that choice. (School Leader, Interview)

Both the housing and school policies worked together to dismantle multiple neighborhoods with decades of history, and the many communities that existed within—destroying the strength of social ties and community support networks, and separating families from common experiences and familiar institutions.

**Delegitimize and Devalue**

In New Orleans, as I describe next, there was a clear pattern of painting the existing communities and institutions in a negative light and contrasting them with the optimistic vision

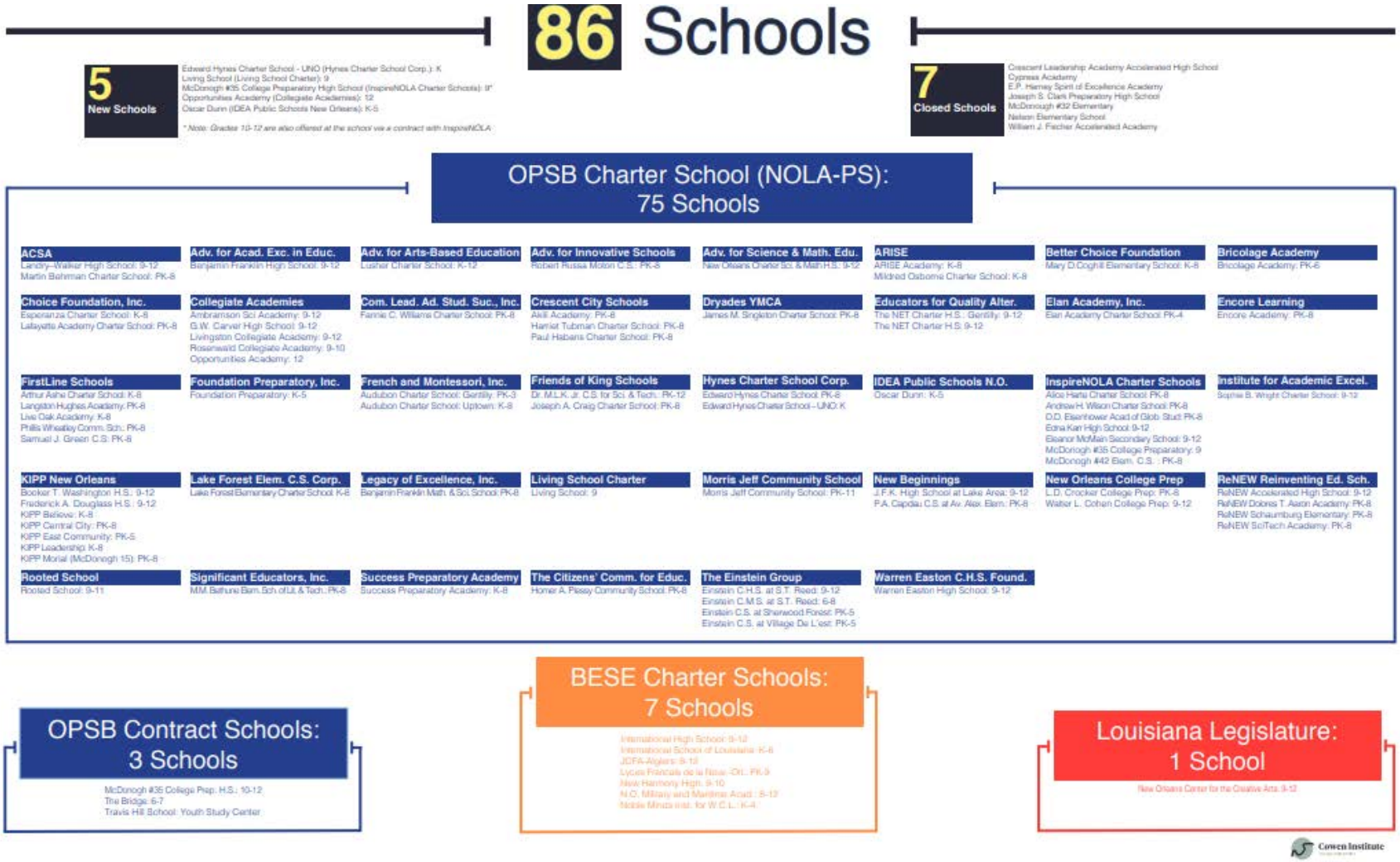


*Figure 8.* The Blueprint of Public Schools in New Orleans: Governance in 2018-2019. Retrieved from http://www.thecoweninstitute.com.php56-17.dfw3-1.websitetestlink.com/uploads/2019-2020_Governance_Chart_Layout_Post_External_Review_August_22-1567529805.pdf

for the “new New Orleans,” which served to rationalize reforms that required displacement and disconnection. Further, this denigration frequently came from “experts” and policy actors who were eager to provide market based-solutions. This delegitimization of community does more than create policy opportunities, its inserts a narrative into the mainstream that diminishes the value, strength, and successes of the targeted community and seeps into the culture of the institutions founded upon those negative narratives. Students, for example, are then attending schools that justify their existence based on the perceived failures of those students’ communities.

**Housing.** Federal, state, and local leaders proclaimed public housing a failed experiment that bred crime and drug use and sustained poverty. In New Orleans, however, crime was down in developments just prior to Katrina compared with previous decades, and the majority of residents were employed (Stasser, 2006). Yet, a republican lawmaker from Baton Rouge famously commented after Hurricane Katrina, “We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn’t do it, but God did” (WSJ, 2005). A former City Council President and mayoral candidate declared that New Orleans should keep out “pimps” and “welfare queens,” while the 2006 City Council President remarked that public housing should be for people who work, not “soap opera watchers” (Stasser, 2006, p. 2). These politicians leveraged stereotypes about public housing residents to paint a negative picture of who was served by public housing. These rhetorical choices made the demolition of those homes and communities more palatable.

Similarly, the Lower 9$^{th}$ Ward was framed as a neighborhood in dire straits, filled with poverty and crime. Yet, home ownership was higher than in most other parts of the city, even if the people who lived their earned $16,000 a year on average. Employment, largely in the service industry, was also fairly high (Rivlin, 2015). One Lower Ninth resident reflected on the media

coverage of and political talking points on the Lower Ninth, "It was just distasteful being called a 'refugee' on American soil and 'the poor, poor people of the Lower Ninth Ward.' We weren't even given credit for being working-class people" (as quoted in Rivlin, 2015, p. 119).

Even upon reflection, those who shaped policy post Katrina maintain a sense of certitude that destroying these communities was a necessary evil for the greater good of the city. This, of course, was a sacrifice chosen by those in power, not by those affected by Katrina. Cowen (2013), in his chapter about moral leadership, noted that the new mixed-income housing built in place of the old projects holds only about 10 percent of former residents, and that 20,000 other households were on the waiting list for subsidized housing. The fact that so many were left without a home was a situation he described as “grim and shameful” (p. 124). Yet, in the very next sentence Cowen goes on to pronounce

> Still—and I say this in sorrowful recognition of the price paid—I have always believed that, on balance, the projects had to go. People cannot live well without a decent environment; they can’t aspire if they’re never given basic dignity—something the Big Four couldn’t provide. The fact is, the older model of public housing came from a period when America was still a segregated society. The time has come for a more integrated, organic vision that offers the poor a way into the mainstream (Cowen, p. 124).

Mayor Landrieu (2015) paints a similar picture in his 2015 address to the National Press Club. In it, he explains that “New Orleans’ notorious big four housing developments, which were run down and were dangerous, [] did not give the people of New Orleans what they needed” (p. 7), failing to talk about how the funding and upkeep of public housing was not attended to by federal, state, or local authorities. “So,” he continues, “we converted this public housing into mixed income communities with amenities like schools, healthcare, and transit” (p. 7). Both

Cowen and Landrieu hold up Columbia Park as the shining example of public-private, mixed income housing. They do not discuss how the development rebuilt less than half the total public housing units, and then only set aside a third of those units for affordable housing (a mere fifteen percent of the total units previously available). Instead they herald the development as "truly place-based" (Landrieu, p. 7), "new," "organic," and "integrated." In reality these words meant something different. 'Place-based' and 'new', were really an erasure of the previous community. 'Organic' was in fact a pre-determined plan made by government and developers, and 'integrated' was a space manufactured primarily for white, middle-class people with very few housing units for low-income people of color.

**Schools.** New Orleans' school system was struggling mightily in the decades preceding Katrina. Some of the major challenges facing the system were long-standing underfunding, major deficits, severe student poverty, and underachievement on traditional measures (Henry Jr, 2019). These conditions, however, were rooted in decades, even centuries of racist and discriminatory policies at every level of government. Instead of recognizing this fact and working to rectify it by investing in the community and providing them with the system they wanted and deserved, my document analysis shows that policy actors, like those on the BNOB Education Commission, Governor Blanco, and the state legislature, seized on the narrative of underperformance and blamed it on mismanagement by the black majority school board, administrators and teachers, and on what they described as an antiquated bureaucracy-laden model of education. In sworn testimony in 2010, Leslie Jacobs, known as a primary architect of New Orleans' education reforms referred to the previous system as morally, academically, and financially bankrupt, and further goes on to cite "systemic incompetence" and corruption as drivers of this failed system (p. 7). Despite the fact that schools in New Orleans were showing

signs of improvement in the early 2000s, in fact nearly eighty percent had met their annual growth goals (Sanders, 2018), the rhetoric used post-Katrina indicated nothing short of a complete renovation was necessary.

In my analysis of speeches and policy documents justifying the state takeover, I found consistent and repeated claims about the utter failure of the education system in New Orleans. Rhetorically, those who created these documents used severe language in their diagnosis of pre-Katrina schools, and contrasted that with positive phrasing for the new system they were trying to install. Katrina was framed as an opportunity to throw the old system away, with little mention or regard for all the people who worked hard within that old system.

In her November 2005 speech, justifying Act 35, Governor Blanco emphasized that rebuilding the schools after Katrina "is about seizing an opportunity for our children and our families who must have full access to quality public education…This bill is an intervention for a school district in financial crisis, in academic crisis and now, in physical crisis due to the extensive damage inflicted on its school buildings by the storms" (paras 31-32). She elaborated on the failure of New Orleans schools by noting that 68 of the 170 schools marked as academically unacceptable statewide were in New Orleans, further "proof that even before the storms, New Orleans schools were not serving our children well" (Blanco, 2005c, paras 4-5). In a similar speech to the state legislature, Blanco remarked, "I know you agree that we cannot afford to rebuild schools that keep failing" (Blanco, 2005d, paras 13-14). Having framed education in New Orleans as a dismal failure, Blanco shifts her rhetoric towards possibility:

> It took the storm of a lifetime, to create the opportunity of a lifetime; an opportunity to start anew in a thoughtful, organized and measured way that serves every single child in New Orleans. If we're going to bring back New Orleans, we must bring back our schools

and we need to bring them back better than before….That's why I'm proposing that the state take control and re-create the schools in Orleans Parish (Blanco, 2005d, paras 11-15)

The state takeover, however, was driven by market ideology, not by the needs of the community. This is clearly evident when Blanco stated that "by infusing proven and innovative educational practices, federal charter school funding, and national foundation support, we will rebuild quality schools in New Orleans" (Blanco, 2005c, para 26).

This narrative was echoed by lawmakers and policy advocates across the nation, both in pushing for the reforms, and when justifying them after the fact.

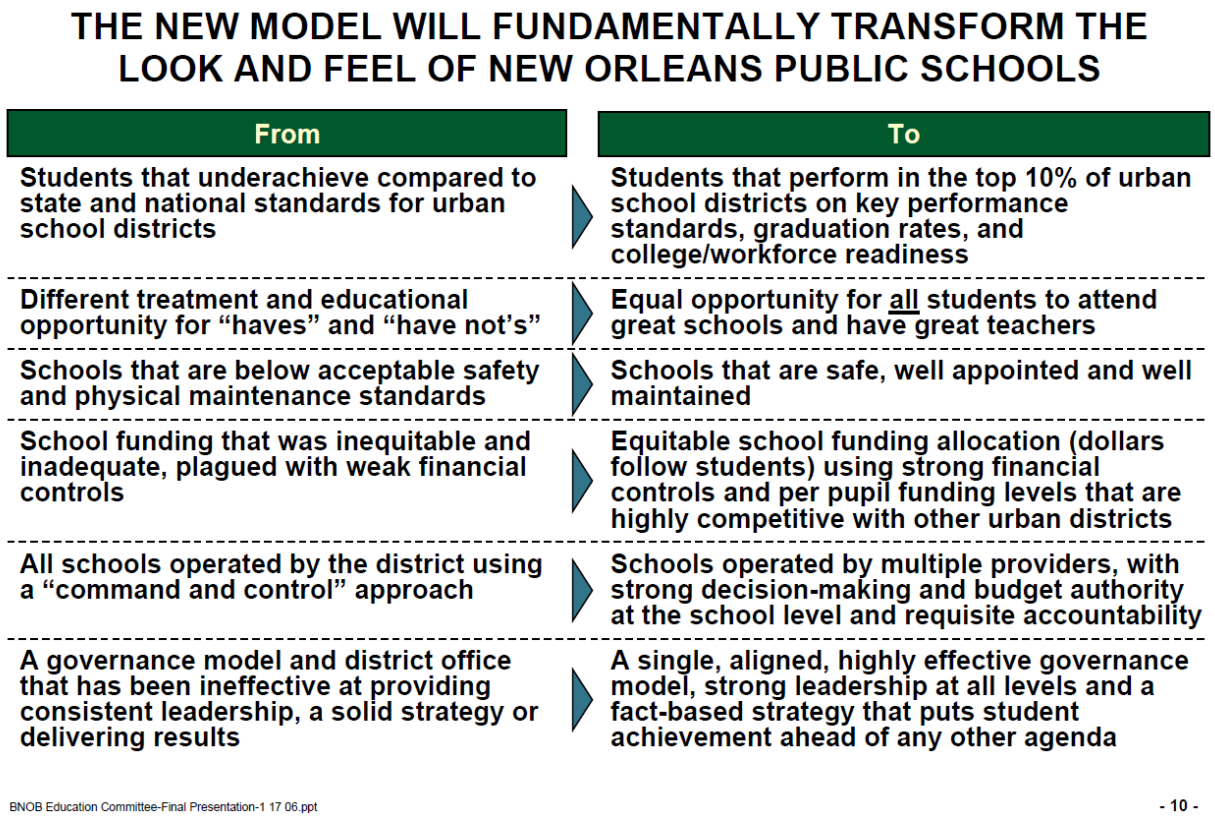


*Figure 9.* BNOB Education Committee slide from final presentation. Retrieved from http://www.columbia.edu/itc/journalism/cases/katrina/City%20of%20New%20Orleans/Bring%20New%20Orleans%20Back%20Commission/BNOB%20Education%20Report%201-17-06.pdf

The BNOB Education Committee made a chart in their final presentation that compared all the 'failings' of the previous system and paired them with the new, innovative ways in which they would be fixed (see Figure 9). Mayor Landrieu (2015), touting New Orleans' successes, also made a point to emphasize that "New Orleans schools were some of the worst in the country," but that the city moved on from that "top-down system and created a new way defined by choice, defined by equity, defined by accountability" (p. 5). He also repeated a frequent and favorite education reform phrase that "geography is no longer a kid's destiny" (p. 5).

The significance of these narratives is twofold. First, none of them deigned to examine why the system was not working in New Orleans. Instead, they relied on assumptions and a dogmatic adherence to market principles. Secondly, they wove together messages about how choice, empowerment, and innovation were tied to an equity project for students, while never addressing larger inequity in the community. For example, one of the main stated problems was bureaucratic mismanagement (solved by the autonomy and flexibility of the charter/portfolio model), but implicitly, there were racial undertones and a failure to acknowledge the long-term lack of support for the public schools in New Orleans at multiple levels of government. A community member noted in my interview with him that the "hostile takeover" essentially relayed the message that "you people [black New Orleanians] have been running the schools. You're doing a terrible job. We can do better, and we're going to take them over and show you." Ultimately, delegitimizing and devaluing property, communities, and schools, allowed federal, state, and local policy makers to intervene and remake these institutions as "knowledgeable experts."

## Dismantle and Replace

**Housing.** The former tenants and protesters who volunteered to clean up the projects themselves and whose desire to return was ignored were correct. Within a year, HANO announced its plans to tear down the large public housing complexes known as The Big Four. Over the next several years, 5000 units from B.W. Cooper, C.J. Peete, Lafitte, and St. Bernard, 3,077 of which were occupied, were knocked down (Reckdahl, 2012). The new mixed-income developments only contain a total of 1,434 apartments, while just more than a third of those are set aside for low-income renters. Before the storm, in total, there were 12,270 public housing units, as of 2016 there were only 2,042 (Brown, 2016). The communities built up over decades

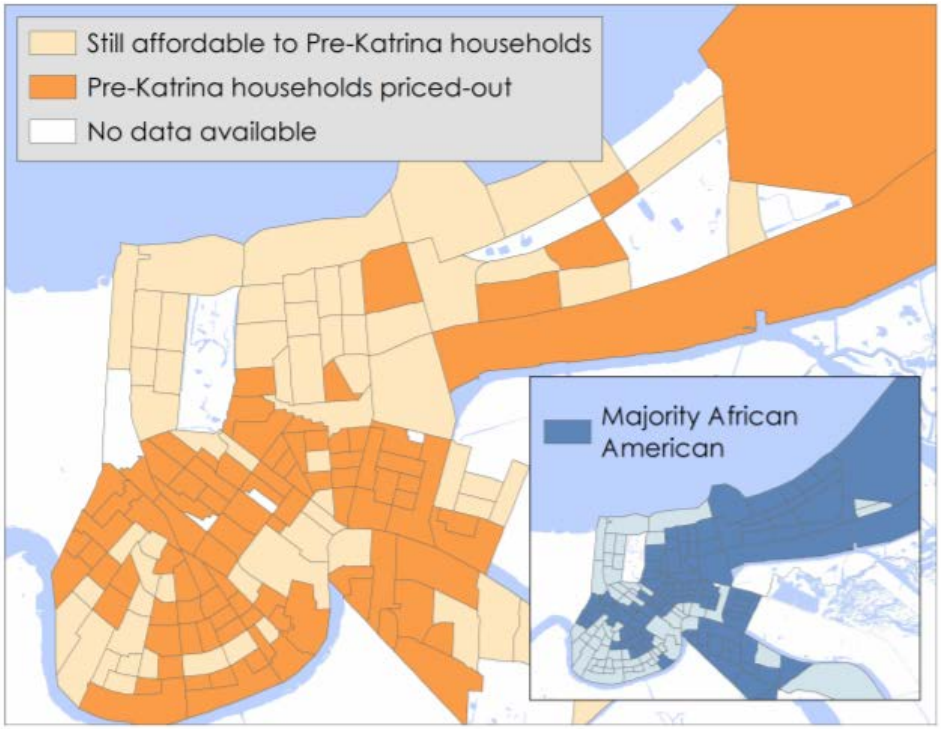


*Figure 10.* Affordable Housing Pre-and-Post Katrina. Retrieved from http://www.gnofairhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/NOLA_Housing_Profile_FINAL.pdf

were gone. One resident, saddened by the change despite her nicer home, recalled, “We had community there, people looked out for their neighbors. We took take of each other’s children

and of whoever got sick and whoever had man trouble. We had a history…They just took it away from us" (as quoted in Cowen, p. 118). Those handful of households who returned to the site of their former public housing, often felt monitored. The same older women added, "Now with these developers, there are rules. How many people are allowed to sit on the porch, you can't plant your own garden, no water for the kiddie pool" (as quoted in Cowen, pp. 118-119), echoing research by Chaskin and Joseph (2012) on mixed-income communities and the uses of space and place. Strongholds of black wealth and culture were also dismantled, as those who owned homes in the Lower 9$^{th}$ or New Orleans East were unable to return and reap the economic benefits of being a home owner.

**Schools.** The public school system of New Orleans was dismantled. Not only were the vast majority of schools removed from local control for nearly fifteen years, but as of July 2019 every single school in New Orleans was a charter school. Schools formerly filled with black teachers and administrators steeped in the culture and history of their students and families were replaced with charter school boards, school leaders, and teachers who frequently were from out of town, were often white, and tended to be young and inexperienced from programs like TFA and TEACHNola, which accounted for 35% of new teacher hires from 2007 through 2013 (Lincove & Strunk, 2018). Lincove et al. further found that the teaching staff in New Orleans prior to Katrina was over 70% black, highly experienced (more than 68% held a master's degree or above), and mostly native to New Orleans. Post-Katrina, only about one-third of those teachers were rehired. New hires were less experienced (only 16% held a master's or above), educated outside of Louisiana, and over 60% white. They attribute these changes to the combination of mass firing and new hiring preferences in the newly opened charter schools.

In many cases school names and locations were changed, which could sever alumni and families' connections. Ironically, given the supposed equity principles underlying the reforms, the only system that was not completely dismantled was the set of selective enrollment schools that disproportionately serve white and middle-class students. At the same time, most CMO-run charters, which subscribe to a 'no excuses' model, serve nearly all black, all low income students.

The dismantling and replacing catalogued above was intentional. According to Henry Jr. (2016), it was part of a process of *white abjectorship*: the way whiteness works to devalue, debase, and dispossess blackness. Leslie Jacobs, a former OPSB Board Member, key architect of the reforms, and member of the BNOB Education Commission, makes this clear in testimony she delivered in 2010:

> And so we did a different model. We decided to *take the failing schools away from the school district,* and it was really modeled after Chapter 11 bankruptcy. So when we took that school away from the school district and put it into the Recovery School District -- and I just have to emphasize, this is recovery from academic failure and wasn't in existence before Katrina. *In taking it away, you strip the school from that school board. And in doing that, the local policies go away, the collective bargaining agreement goes away, **the people go away**,* though they have the right to be interviewed and kept if the new operator of that school so chooses. And so out comes the building, the students, and the money and a fresh start. (Jacobs, 2010, p. 8, emphasis added)

This description of the previously majority black school system, staffed by majority black veteran teachers, and run by a majority black school board, is physical and violent. It is her describing how she, a white reformer, and others constructed a policy environment in which the

black community was “stripped” of its stake, say, and democratic ownership of the school system.

**Disempower and Diminish**

The project of rebuilding New Orleans, then, was one of replacement not investment. Displacement and disconnection occurred at multiple levels, while the devaluation of the black community through rhetoric was borne out of a lack of faith in communities of color to make change, be a part of change, and have a clear vision for their future and communities. As a result, advocates and policy makers versed in white middle class culture and neoliberal ideology, created a system that answers and is accountable to white middle class values, merging the desire to institute market-based reform borne out of a savior mentality and infused with paternalism. The exclusion of the black community from policy decisions, as outlined above, is akin to a devaluation of their experience, and exemplifies the “we know what is best for you” paternalistic nature of the policy process and, ultimately the policy solutions. Both actions and beliefs informed these policy decisions. In the housing sector, federal, state, and local actors believed public housing, utilized largely by low-income black families, fed a culture of poverty. To fix the problems associated with that culture, homes and communities were destroyed and rebuilt as modern, mixed income communities, where new behaviors can be learned and bad behaviors monitored (Chaskin & Joseph, 2012). The pre-Katrina school system, which was locally run and majority black, was denigrated and belittled. Governor Blanco and the legislature approved a complete erasure and overhaul of OPSB, instituting in its place a system that adhered to neoliberal values of individuality, choice, autonomy, and competition as opposed to community, history, social justice, and cultural sustainability.

It follows, then, that policy makers fashioned a city that diminished the power of the black community in multiple arenas. In 2010, the city elected its first white mayor in 32 years; a 5-2 supermajority controlled the formerly black majority City Council; and the school board flipped to majority white. In 2012, Tulane's executive director of the Southern Institute for Education and Research, commented that "The perception among most African-Americans…is that they are living politically as a defeated group in their own city" (Rivlin, 2015). The black middle class faced multiple blows. They lost public sector jobs in the thousands, were not offered the same resources for rebuilding their homes, and no longer harnessed the same political power as in the past. Low-income black households were even worse off, as they were not included in the rebuilding plan, the plight of renters was barely considered, and the decision to destroy public housing in favor of attractive mixed-income developments certainly does not serve the majority of this population well, even if a few get access to nicer housing.

Dismantling neighborhood schooling and the democratic nature of public education took the most immediate means of collective action and political organizing away from communities. Further, the power of community was diminished due to the persistent narrative of failure that devalued the accomplishments and culture of the black community, such as those used to create new policy post-Katrina. The rhetoric that imbues policy decisions can make its way into the implementation of that policy, and in the case of education can steep institutions' identities in a belief of superiority (i.e. framing the students' families and communities negatively), further diminishing and devaluing their contributions and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2006). Relatedly, in an all charter system schools are dis-incentivized from being a part of their geographic community, thereby neglecting their prospective role in generating positive

community change. Families also have less incentive to work hard or band with other families to build/improve school because they can always exercise choice to go elsewhere.

Conceptualizing the mechanisms by which neoliberal reforms were conceived, framed, and implemented in New Orleans helps explain why they did not serve equity, and instead served to disempower the black community. Further, the reliance on market principles discouraged meaningful cross-sector planning that could purposefully address the varying needs of the black community in New Orleans. Instead, policy decisions made in multiple sectors compounded inequity, highlighted the outcomes of policy decisions that are rooted in market principles and ignore history, racial, and systemic inequality. Part I of this findings chapter examined how inequity was baked into the policy process at the macro level. However, all policy decisions have individual consequences. Part II of this chapter uses interview data to explore how parents, community members, school leaders, and school board members experience the market-based school system in New Orleans and ultimately what their experience says about how the system is working towards equity.

## Part II: Inequity and the Chartering of New Orleans

*"The challenges of society show up at the school door, so to speak, or they show up in education. Because we are in an environment where we're not only just not getting along by way of racial equity and trust and reconciliation. Harm is being done to the parents and grandparents and families of the children that we say we're trying to educate. Policy harm is being done to them. Because of that, the children are not going to be well, and they're going to struggle to learn." (New Orleans Community Member, Interview)*

New Orleans families were promised a world class education, brought about by adhering to market-based reforms. They were promised empowerment through choice. They were promised that there would no longer be 'haves' and 'have nots' in the system. They were promised an array of quality schools governed transparently by an efficient oversight body. They were promised competition and autonomy (privatization) would be the lever that improved the

system. They were promised these things and were told that the tradeoffs—neighborhood schools, community disempowerment, lack of democratic accountability—would be worth it. Parents, administrators, and community members who, at the time of data collection had experienced the system for over 10 years, provided insights via interviews into whether this was the case. In addition, I conducted observations of school board meetings, community meetings, forums, and a protest group meeting. The findings below illustrate how those involved education in New Orleans experience the system in terms of equity as measured by mobility and opportunity, trust, well-being, and agency.

**Mobility and Opportunity**

All the stakeholders interviewed agreed that there was a lack of access to quality options in New Orleans. Few schools were offering the type of academic program parents' desire, and therefore failed to provide families with adequate opportunities for their children's success. The system was described as "such a mixed bag" with "schools that are just failing." One board member admitted, "I think we have a lot of work to do." A school administrator and parent shared that "my wife and I realized there wasn't a school we were thrilled to send our daughter to." Overall, stakeholders across the board agreed the system was not living up to the standard of providing excellent options for all families.

Generally, parents wanted a spot in the same small set of schools, noting that "out of 60 schools, [there are] maybe about four that I would actually send my children to." The fact that everyone wanted spots in these schools was exasperating, because "all of the schools that had good grades, of course, there were no more seats. So it was like he just had to go where there was a spot." Another mom explained that she "tried in vain to get him into a Lusher or an Audubon or Ben Franklin, Morris Jeff, one of the other higher-performing schools. But yeah,

that didn't work out." The process of finding a desirable school and then knowing the slim likelihood of getting in was "frustrating" because it is hard "to find a school that I feel like is compatible with our needs and our desires for our kids." And while some families felt like they were stuck with whatever school they got, regardless of quality, others stressed that they would not send their kids to an underperforming school, inducing anxiety. Worried that his daughter might not get into one of the four schools they selected, one father explained why private school was not a sustainable option:

> Like I said, that's not sustainable, because we have two other daughters coming down the pipe. I don't think you could bank on having a better paying job. You just have to hope you have a better paying job at some point. That's the backup plan. Go with our initial list. If we can't get into schools, then we're going to have to try to get her into a private or Catholic school. I definitely don't want to send her to an under-performing school. I just can't jeopardize that.

Private school was an option for some, but not for others. The dangling of a few high performing schools with very few seats available created a whole other level of stress for parents. A mom provided her candid assessment of the promise of choice:

> I think that school choice ... I think we're moving towards it but we're not there. When you look at something like school choice to me that means that I can say, "I think that school X is the best option for my child and that's where I want him to go." Not that I think school X is the best choice for my kid, I'm going to throw my name in the hat and maybe, possibly, potentially, there's a one in hundred and eighty-thousand chance they'll get in.

**Trust & Agency**

> *People don't respond well to what's been called reform or even a takeover. The truth is, if I could just be provocative for a moment, it was a sort of cleansing. It was a taking. It was a taking that is the kind of thing you normally see in other countries. People feel that way, and it's not just a feeling, it is a fact. The trust is broken as severely and significantly as if your spouse not only cheated on you, but took all the money when they left. (Community Member, Interview)*

Trust, especially in education, is derived from a sense that the institutions put in place are centered around the needs of the community, and that the leaders charged with safekeeping those institutions, make decisions transparently, work openly and efficiently, are responsive to the public, and that governance is accountable to the people. In New Orleans, gaining trust after destructive and harmful implementation of market-reforms (after centuries of historical racism and discrimination) both in education and citywide, is a monumental task. One that has yet to be accomplished. One community member summed this up when he explained:

> There's generational distrust that is based on the merits of what people did, how they acted, and the divestments that were made from community. If there is going to be a building of trust, it is going to take that level of investment and making up for the purposeful disconnection of people from the ability to control what is theirs. That just hasn't happened. It's just not happened, and it has to happen, I think, for the trust to be built there.

An Orleans Parish School Board member acknowledged that “there are definitely spaces and places where trust is not great.” Overhauling the system and replacing it with one that is “flexible” means a constantly evolving education landscape, and “parents are stressed because there's been a whole bunch of changes in a short amount of time, and they don't feel like they understand what in the devil is going on. And honestly sometimes we don't either,” noted on Administrator. Parents and community stakeholders frequently questioned who is making

decisions and how they come to those decisions, complaining they felt no authentic engagement with families and communities.

For example, in 2016, the Orleans Parish School Board decided it was going to turn its five remaining direct run schools into charter schools. The decision sparked a strong response from parents and teachers, some of whom organized a protest group. A leader of that group explained why she felt compelled to become an activist:

> It really bothers me that we just have a select handful of people making decisions for a major metropolitan city with regards to the type of educational system we're going to have for generations, because I mean, there's no kidding yourself, this is going to be next to impossible to undo if it happens. And that it's never been put to the public, and they've purposefully prevented the public from having any voice or perspective.

After attending multiple meetings put in place by the district to explain the changes, I saw parents' emotional pleas to keep their schools public cut short after their two-minute period was up. Other times, parents were not even allowed to speak, but instead instructed to write their questions on paper and the superintendents' team picked some responses and question to address. A board member recognized this shortcoming, noting that

> You go to meetings, and there's no way to not acknowledge that there is an unrest with certain populations within our school district, which makes complete sense because our school district is not perfect and is not serving every student well. And so, until we get to that place, I think there will always be an uncertainty and an uneasiness and unrestfulness.

This silencing and a general failure to adequately respond to parents concerns, deepened the distrust and minimized the agency parents felt and had over how their schools operated.

Distrust also stemmed from the notion that charter schools are an unproven experiment, often lead, at least in New Orleans, by outsiders. Further adding to the distrust was the refusal by many board members, legislators, and school leaders to acknowledge the harms of the reforms put in place. For example, an anecdote related by an OPSB board member and former charter school CEO captures the cavalier attitude of a true believer in market-based reform:

> It's like when people come to the mic and complain about how this system took away the neighborhood school. Well, it wasn't actually quite ... And I think it's fair to argue that potentially, the policies that were in place may have made it more conducive because there were no restrictions. So yes, I can see that argument. But at the same time, nobody forced parents to leave their neighborhood, so parents had a role too.

In his remarks, the board member belittled the parents, painting them as complainers, refused to accept responsibility for destroying the neighborhood based public schools system, and ultimately stated that parents are to blame, because within the system of constrained choice that replaced public schools parents did not always pick the school closest to home.

It is not hard, then, to understand why parents were wary of the motivations of those running the schools. Especially, when the system design makes it “really difficult to create a school culture” when “you don't understand and don't have a connection with the community from which these young people come.” These concerns were on full display at the NAACP meeting held in New Orleans in 2016, in which they were deciding whether to call for a moratorium on charter schools. The room at city hall was packed, every seat filled, and bursting with emotions. Parents and students alike were unable to contain themselves, some crying, some yelling, some interrupting school leaders testifying about the benefits of charters. The raw emotion and the constant refrain of “stop experimenting on our children” sent a clear message to

the NAACP. Not soon after, citing, in part, the meeting in New Orleans, the NAACP did in fact call for a moratorium on new charter schools.

> In her interview, one mom echoed the sentiments expressed at the NAACP forum,
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> .. it almost feels like being part of a social experiment. When you look at some of these charters. A lot of them are, in my opinion, experimental. And we think that a group of folks who came together and said, "We think that this is a better way to teach kids." If we have the funding. We have the backing. And we're going to open a charter school and we're going to convince parents to take a gamble on us and do something completely different. And maybe it'll work.

A former charter school leader and CEO all but confirmed these theories.

> He explained, yeah…I was young and new... And so I naturally kind of gravitated towards what was the established best practice at the time, which at the time was this no excuses model. And so the sort of philosophy of sweat the small stuff, high expectations, long days, I mean you know kids, all of that, all the no excuses concept I was the poster child for. And then after a couple, three years of trying to work that way, I realized I was suspending students every year multiple times without real improvement. It wasn't like it was helping them. Many of them even failed. The fact that we were getting growth on a percent overall of kids getting proficient, which was our stated goal by the stated accountability system, but the other percent, the percent that was not proficient, was sort of getting lost because we had enough kids growing, so we weren't really reaching every child, which is obviously what we wanted to do.

In this scenario, the school adopted a model that was considered best practice by the charter sector, but without any real research to base to back it up. After implementing it for three years,

to the detriment of many real children, he came to realize it was not working as he had hoped and then he decided to change course. When parents are forced to choose among schools that all use the same approach, their agency is denied, their ability to have a say when, where, and how their children can be innovated upon is stripped. Very few charters in New Orleans, to this day, were started by long term residents and members of the community, not for lack of effort, but because the community centered model did not fit the neoliberal, accountability-laden, white-middle class norms pervading market-based education reforms (Henry, 2019).

**Well-being & Agency**

The market-model of education based on choice and competition did not feel empowering to parents. Instead, this group of mostly middle-class parents with resources and support networks, reported feeling exhausted, frustrated, disappointed, and stressed. The system placed an undue burden on parents to get into the school they most desire. So much so, that a parent who was told a school was "first come first serve" decided to "camp out the night before." Other parents experienced choice-exhaustion, "I wish I didn't have to make another choice, I'm tired." Another shared that "picking a kindergarten was harder than picking a college. And I got it wrong, which is what I tell other parents when they asked me questions about the process. We're like, 'We got it wrong. We definitely got it wrong the first time and we fixed it.'" The fix was a phone call to the Parent Resource Center in November, asking if any spots had opened up at their number one school, luckily one just had. "Well, I don't know. I don't know. It's exhausting."

Not every parent was as lucky though. One family had been searching for a school that fits their son's needs for years, having switched him twice before second grade. At the time of the interview, they were again hoping to get one of their top choice through the OneApp open

enrollment. Just a week or two before the interview, she said she "got the notification that he wasn't accepted to any of them." She continued:

> They told us to send him back to [his current school]. There is a second round, and I will try again for the second round, but honestly, I'm not optimistic that they're going to let him in. The number one is what now, what do we do, because I certainly don't want to send him back [to his school] and he starts another grade that they're not engaging him or giving him what he needs. I don't want to do that. I feel like that's going to turn him away from school a little bit. I don't want to do that, because he's a smart kid, so I don't want to do that to him.

To her the whole endeavor was "exhausting." Similarly, another family had their son placed in a school they did not love. So, they resigned themselves to "make it work wherever [their children] go or do extra, you already help them at home, but doing extra at home to make sure that they're not falling behind if he's in school you see it's not where it should, where in needs to be." Because of the stress around choosing and the fact that most schools were not considered high performing (in fact as of 2018, only 14 of the nearly 80 schools were rated an A or B), parents expressed that they would rather just have a mediocre neighborhood school, where transportation was convenient and they did not have to worry that their children might be placed in a school 30 minutes away "for no good reason." The system placed extra burdens on families, some of whom may not have the capacity to shoulder them, which affected parents' well-being.

Parents described an illusion or false promise of choice, which added to families' frustration and sense of uncertainty. This was exemplified by their strong, negative reactions to the OneApp, the enrollment system lauded for creating more equity (i.e. removing the barriers involved in entering each school's lottery separately; and removing the capacity of schools to

choose students). Waiting to hear results, one mom reflected, “if he doesn't get in he automatically goes back to that same school or he has nowhere to go. That's not a true choice but it's kind of what we had.” Another parent explained that her child was placed more than once at a KIPP school, even though she never put it on her list. Parents were asked to place their trust in a completely ambiguous process, that seemingly fails frequently to produce desired results. And so, “it's not really a choice. You can't call it "parent choice" or "school choice" or whatever. The schools I've chosen ... And I'm giving you multiple options, and you shoot me down every single time, then it's not my choice because you're taking it completely out of my hands.” Ultimately, though, the OneApp is a symptom of a non-functioning system. There just are not enough quality schools for the algorithm to work properly. As a result, families tended to agree with this sentiments expressed by this mom:

> I'm concerned about the illusion that school choice exists in New Orleans. And I think that's the process is not transparent enough in terms of how OneApp works, for one thing. It's not transparent. I mean you fill out a piece of paper or a survey online, and it goes into a black box and you come back with a school. And that's it. That's all the information that is given is everything in New Orleans everything about public education in New Orleans is a hope and a wish and a prayer. It's a chance. You get a chance at selecting the school that you want for your kids.

Despite parents’ dissatisfaction with the OneApp, administrators seemed to maintain faith in it. Noting that it “eliminated advantages that people with money would have in the public system” and, in some cases even prioritized low income students for certain schools, and so “its advancing equity.”

## You Can't Innovate Your Way to Equity

"Top-down" policy making that relies on the supposed neutrality of market mechanisms is highly problematic, especially in communities that have long experienced systemic inequality, discrimination, lack of resources and political power. This is the case because no level of innovation, competition, or choice can increase equity without first attending to the historical injustices experienced. Much of the research critical of privatization of education and market-driven reforms focus on the bad actors, those in it to profit off or communities. Many educators, however, are unwitting participants in misguided effort, fully (though perhaps naively) believing they are doing equity work by helping to provide better education options and close achievement gaps.

For example, a school leader and founder, who outlined in great detail his diligence in educating himself on the basic tenants of structural racism, white privilege, and equity, operate without qualms in a system that precipitates those same structures. After spending the majority of the interview discussing equity and race, the participant was asked what the reforms mean for equity, and whether the structure needed to change. His response indicated that cannot break free of market ideology:

> I don't know that the structures need to change though….Those structures allowed me to create the school….I don't know that we've got a better alternative. Right? I don't know that a traditional school district in a city, like in most American cities that are geographically stratified by race and class, yields equity any better and it probably is worse…I think that this system that we are operating on is still inequitable, but I think it's less inequitable than a more traditional school district system.

> Equitable. Equitable…So access to schools. Ability to attend more schools than the ones that you are zoned for. We've eliminated advantages that people with money would have in the public system. Right? When we had people applying to OneApp, applying to [this school] from OneApp, I had very influential people calling me to try to get in. I had nothing to do with this…And so they can't get in. They have as much of a shot, well, not anymore. They actually have less of a shot than a poor family trying to get into this school. Because we have an advantage in admissions for low-income families….That's a good thing. That's advancing equity.

Those structures however, privilege a certain class of people. These are often elite, highly educated, reformers, frequently white, who have the privilege and resources to decide, that the school they used to work at is not great. And then turn around and develop, pitch, and receive a charter for an equity focused school. Further, instead of embarking on a community centered approach to designing the school, he decided to "create a kick ass school that I know appeals to white sensibilities and then leave them alone and go out and recruit families of color." Exemplifying again, this paternalistic and white centered mindset among reformers in New Orleans.

By subscribing to the ideology of meritocracy and individual responsibility, and without recognizing the harm done to communities by taking over schools, instituting systems that favor and come out of the world-view of the white middle-class, educators continue miseducate children of all backgrounds about the roots and remedies of inequality. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, ahistorical fixes exacerbate inequality. Well-intentioned reformers latch onto a narrative that is destructive for the community, i.e. "the status quo" (in this case pre-Katrina

schools) was a disaster. The message sent to children in schools and the larger community is "your community failed" and you need us and our ideas to save you from yourselves.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, the cycle of market reform described in this section illustrates a subversive process, whereby the economic and competitive city imperative drives decision making, causing the policy decisions and outcomes to appear both neutral and natural, when in fact both were deeply racialized and disempowering. Those with the reins of power decided what types institutions, services, and political access would be available, to whom, and at what price. The policies put in place separated residents from their communities, their institutions, their histories and cultural wealth, from levers of power, and from their physical space (i.e. neighborhood). Families and community members experience multiple and different levels of harm, wherein their opportunity to build wealth, to live a good life (well-being), to be empowered and included, and to have full access to democratic participation are limited and even stripped away.

# CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

This study explored how the politics of race and power and a subscription to traditional economic theories at the federal, state, and local level shaped the post-Katrina rebuilding of New Orleans and the attendant sweeping school reform. My findings reveal the flawed logic of both traditional economic development and market-based education as envisioned by reformers, and how policy actors used the market to discipline, sanction, and cut out the black community. Further, drawing on critical policy analysis and semi-structured interviews, this study moved beyond the typical narrative surrounding school choice—largely dominated by easily measurable data (i.e., test scores)—to incorporate a broader set of outcomes that impact students, families, and community. The findings and analysis demonstrated that policy actors and advocates were in some cases actively working against equity, while in others were engaged in a faux fight for equality. This stemmed from a purposeful failure to grasp the vital and interconnected nature of policy, systemic inequality, and racism, and an ideological allegiance to neoliberal principles that intentionally disregard history. As a result, the layers of policy decisions made in post-Katrina New Orleans—often in the name of providing opportunity—failed to address any of the root causes of inequality, were ahistorical, and ultimately reaffirmed systemic inequality.

By using a theoretical approach comprised of political economy in urban education, critical race theory, and a framework generated from the fields of sustainable, human, and community development, this work situated education reforms within a larger project of economic development, complicating the predominate narrative of the success of New Orleans post-Katrina, and extending research focusing on the relationship between schools, neighborhoods, cities and urban development. By focusing on the experiences of multiple stakeholders within a market-based education system, I highlighted how the policy choices made

within the education model reflected and compounded the political, economic, and social injuries brought on by city, state, and federal actors in the rebuilding of the city. This study, then, contributes to a small but emergent strand of literature in education examining the relationship between schools and economic development, with a particular focus on how policies impact urban communities, and in turn, the political, social, and economic well-being of the city in the long-term.

**Theoretical Contributions**

My study makes unique contributions to several fields of education research. It broadens the scope of school choice theory, which is dominated by quantitative studies of test-scores (e.g. Argrist, Pathak, & Walters, Betts & Tang, 2019; 2013; Dobie & Fryer, 2013; Harris & Larsen, 2016), and makes the case for looking beyond the individual consumer to the broader context and community impact. It also complicates the narrative around choice, charters, and competition by demonstrating how ahistorical market-based reforms are never neutral (e.g. Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Dixson, 2016; Rothstein, 2017) and therefore cannot be evaluated without attention to context. This research adds a critical lens to the principles of sustainable, human, and community development, and generates a framework better suited to examine the multi-faceted impacts of reforms imbued with the dynamics of race and power. Finally, it answers growing calls to better situate education policy analysis within larger socio-cultural and political contexts.

As part of my findings, I built a model for explaining the mechanisms underlying how communities are disempowered by neoliberal policy making. Existing research (e.g. Buras, 2015; Harvey, 2007; Klein, 2007; Lipman, 2011; Lipsitz, 1998) tracks the underlying profit motive of neoliberal policy actors and advocates, as well at the repercussions for marginalized communities, i.e. accumulation by dispossession. However, few studies have conceptualized

how the stages or processes within this neoliberal project lead to disempowerment. In this study, then, I show how initial disinvestment and destabilization lay the groundwork for a multi-pronged campaign of displacement and disconnection, de-legitimization and devaluation, and dismantling and replacing, ultimately leading to disempowerment and the diminishing of community. This model can serve as a tool for researches seeking to evaluate equity implications of top-down policies enacted upon communities.

**Summary of Findings**

My findings show that, at both the city and school level, policies stripped power from the black community in order to build a new system that consolidated control and tended to conform to white/centrist/neoliberal models of economic success. Accordingly, the design and measures of success of the post-Katrina school system mirrored traditional approaches to economic development. For example, while the charter-centric, portfolio model of school reform in New Orleans drove up academic achievement (akin to, say, the city boasting a higher GDP), the benefits were not spread equally, or more importantly, to those who would benefit most.

Further, the long-term equity tradeoffs for these improved numbers were not taken into account during the policy creation and initial implementation process. Beyond that, the black community, largely the recipients of those trade-offs, were not authentically consulted or included during any part of the policy process. The "hostile takeover," as one participant phrased it, did not only occur at the school level, but at the neighborhood and city level as well. New Orleans today is a whiter, wealthier, more educated city (a.k.a a city experiencing gentrification). And while the city followed the traditional pattern of gentrification: the process by which central-city neighborhoods that have experienced sustained disinvestment, then experience renewal, reinvestment and the influx of college education white residents (Smith 1998),

displacing low-income people of color and reaping the benefits of increased home values and "upgraded" amenities—the schools experienced a kind of inverted or alternative form of gentrification.

The initial phase of gentrification (Moskowitz, 2018) was the same, sustained disinvestment. However, unlike in other neighborhoods and cities typically studied (e.g. Cucchiara, 2013; Freidus, 2016; Posey-Maddox, 2014; Pearman & Swain, 2018), white families have not slowly invaded and taken over schools in gentrified neighborhoods. Instead, New Orleans schools have remained majority black and majority low-income, with a few exceptions. I argue that what we see in New Orleans represents a different form of gentrification. In New Orleans, after Katrina, gentrification actually happened at the administrative level. Renewal occurred when the state took over schools (Morel, 2018), rebranded them through chartering, and financed them with reinvestment from the federal government and foundations. It was not the students who were physically displaced, but the teachers, principals and board members. A well-educated cadre of mostly white education entrepreneurs moved in and offered new amenities to a captive population, who were forced to utilize the system provided to them. Locals who wanted to create their own charters were nearly systematically denied (Henry Jr., 2019). Families and communities were politically displaced (Morel & Nuamah, 2019), but required to consume the product, in some ways similar to the system of debt peonage/sharecropping during Jim Crow (Stovall, 2018). The rewards of the system have accrued largely to those education entrepreneurs who have built their careers on the work, and frequently have branched off to form nonprofits and education related businesses (Buras, 2015). This process then, wiped out most of the traditional power bases and spaces of community gathering (unions, local schools, etc.) without

any attempt to regenerate space for community uplift, self-determination, and inter-racial and justice oriented dialogue.

Black families suffered multifold as a result of these policy decisions. At the city level they were forced from their homes, their neighborhoods, their history, and their culture. They lost opportunities to build wealth, retain good paying, unionized jobs. Their access to political power and community organizing was diminished, even if the undercurrent of protest remains in New Orleans. The charterized school system left parents stressed, overwhelmed, dissatisfied, frustrated, distrusting and disempowered. Choice and competition may have raised test scores and graduation rates (Harris & Larsen 2016), but at what cost? More importantly, the cost was not decided by those who paid it.

**Policy Implications**

**Working within a neoliberal policy environment.** Finally, because urban development, school choice and charter schools are likely here to stay, policy makers must be much more deliberate in constructing protections for equity at all stages of the reform process. This can be done, at least in part, by adopting the principles of models like *inclusive development*, an approach that ensures marginalized populations are included in each phase of policy making: creation, implementation, and monitoring, with the ultimate goal of generating policy interventions that significantly move the needle towards equity. The coordination of policy interventions across sectors can provide resources and help ameliorate the devastating affects the post-Katrina policy interventions (i.e. pushing for wage increases, more affordable housing, culturally sustaining schools, and social and health services in concert with one another). Shift the focus away from individualized market outcomes as the markers of success and instead

evaluate policy interventions based on outcomes like agency, well-being, and trust and an expanded notion of mobility and opportunity.

Within the realm of education, a number of policies could begin to change the structure and power dynamic currently in place. An organization like New Schools for New Orleans, which is largely responsible for the startup funds used by the current CMO charters across the city, could fund and create a community-based nonprofit that provides the resources for local families and educators to write charter applications and provide supports for those that are approved. The school board or state could require that the superintendent match one-to-one community created charters with the corporate charters he so frequently authorizes. The state legislature and/or OPSB could reintroduce the portion of the charter law nullified by Governor Blanco's executive orders, which stipulated that families and educators have a real vote over which charter applications are accepted. OPSB, as the only authorizer, could provide extra points for new charters that ensure school leaders and teachers are fluent in the history of race relations in America, and specifically New Orleans, and in pedagogy infused with antiracism and culturally sustaining practices, while provided professional development and support to already existing schools. Incentivize schools to partner and contract with local community organizations, businesses, and vendors. Generate an evaluation system that measures the impact of schools on community and equity, meaning focuses on measures beyond test scores and graduation rates, one example of this is using the framework introduced in this dissertation, that advocates for a focus on multigenerational equity and community empowerment.

**Pushing for a paradigm shift.** Achieving justice oriented equity, however, requires more. It requires allies and antiracists to band together with communities of color and demand that politicians and the ruling class reckon with the past, provide recompense, and yield their

grasp on power. It requires genuine collaborative and inclusive policy making. Quality education requires policy makers and communities to work together. This type of collaboration can only be achieved when "there is a recognition that the success of black education is tied to the development of citizenship and a communities' political empowerment" (Morel, 2018, p. 138). Neoliberally situated state takeovers, like the one in New Orleans, that sideline local communities from influencing policies that directly affect them and that imply communities do not know what is best for their own children, cannot accomplish this. Yet, a trifold logic around whiteness: the possessive investment in whiteness (Lipsitz, 1995), white saviorism (Aronson, 2017; Straubhaar, 2015), and white innocence (Ross, 1990) or strategic forgetting (Triece, 2017), all work together to disincentivize those benefitting from the current structure and system to change course and pursue polices that seek justice and equity. Pushing for a paradigm shift is a tall order, but education can be the place that foments a revolution.

## Conclusion

Based on my findings, I argue that the implications for equity go far beyond schools and result largely from a failure to take into account the interconnected nature of policy, politics, systemic inequality, and racism (Anderson & Donchick, 2016; Lipman, 2011; Rury & Mirel, 1997; Scott & Holme, 2016), while at the same time envisioning equity from a shortsighted and narrow lens. These reformers scope of understanding equity remains couched within a neoliberal paradigm, and despite dedicating energy towards schools in the name of civil rights and a more equitable education, they continue to perpetuate a system that at a minimum maintains existing social hierarchies and in some cases exacerbates them; and those involved in the world of education maintain a belief in education as "the great equalizer" failing to push for cross-sector policies and inclusive policy making, the keys to generating equity. These conclusions are not

intended to minimize the need for better academic achievement (though they do call into question what that means and looks like), but urge policy makers and practitioners not to have tunnel vision around finite measurements like high-stakes testing. For, raising test scores provides only minimal individualized opportunity and will not adequately address structural inequality. In fact, research currently shows that the wealth gap actually grows with increases in educational attainment (Hamilton, 2019).

For example, the proliferation of 'no excuses' charter schools across New Orleans, whose existence is based upon the notion that the closing the achievement gap (i.e. test scores) is akin to educational equity (Graham, 2019), is problematic for the project of justice oriented equity. The underlying philosophy that the problems students bring with them to the classroom should not affect educators' ability to provide them with a high quality education (there are no excuses for "underachievement") is in many ways akin to colorblindness—giving school leaders and teachers an out from working on and thinking about larger structural and systemic issues in the communities surrounding them. Further, the second aspect of no excuses, 'sweat the small stuff," i.e. enforcing compliance and control as a way to keep those outside factors at bay, focuses on "surviving not thriving" (Love, 2018) and does not teach students to speak up and challenge conditions that perpetuate inequality (Graham, 2019).

In his autobiography, Frederick Douglass wrote a commentary on the failures of Reconstruction. His observations about emancipation, freedom, and equality are wholly relevant to the urban renewal and school choice reforms in New Orleans. He writes that freedom is relative and fairly useless if it does not come with capital and power. So, for instance, the freedom from the 'dangerous and poor conditions of public housing', or the freedom to choose any school in the city does not further the cause of equity and social justice because those

freedoms do not come with access to wealth, power, and self-determination. In New Orleans, the black community has only been granted freedom within the constraints of a system set up by a ruling class that does not appear to have interest in making reparations for the centuries of policies that drove inequality in the first place. Schools entrenched in that system are teaching students to live successfully in a state of subjugation, not how to overthrow it. And because that is the case, schools are operating in opposition to equity. In the current political era, there seem to be a rising awareness and acceptance of systemic racism, white privilege, and the need to generate policy that rectifies and compensates for centuries of inequality. Educators can take up the mantle and become advocates and community allies, teaching students to fight for change and remake society so that it serves justice and equity.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Parent Interview Protocol

**PART I (Neighborhood and Community)**

1. I'd love if you could tell me a little bit about yourself, your history in this city. For instance, how long have you lived in New Orleans, and in this neighborhood? How many children do you have? What is your occupation? [probe on family, neighborhoods, other areas of city, if they attended NOLA schools]
2. Can you talk a little bit more about the neighborhood you are in now?
    a. How do you feel about it (attached, connected)? Do you draw a sense of strength from your neighborhood?
    b. Are there particular places in the neighborhood you go to/visit frequently or where people meet up? (push on what drives them there)
    c. What about the people…how would you describe the people that live in this neighborhood (probe on relationships to those people)
3. What community groups do you participate in?
    **a. Are these primarily located in your neighborhood/throughout the city**
    **b. How did you find out/decide to join these groups?**
    **c. Why do you participate in these groups?**
4. Who are the people you spend the most time with (outside of those who live in your house).
    **a. Of these people, who do you go to for advice?**
    **b. Which, if any, of these people did you consult when choosing a school for your children [probe, how did those conversations go, what types of questions did you ask, information did you seek, how influential was their opinion/advice]**

**PART II (School, CD, Community)**

5. Now, that we've transitioned to talking about schools can you give a little bit of background on your children (age, grade, gender, schools they have attended)?
6. What educational goals do you have for your child/children? Why do you think these goals are important?
    **a. In what ways is the school your child attends helping him/her achieve these goals?**
7. Can you describe the school/s your child/children attend now?
    a. What do you like/dislike about the school/s your child/children are attending?
    b. Is the school providing the type of education you want for your children? What does that education look like (if yes or no)?
    **c. Is this school located in your neighborhood? (by choice? – if not was this a factor in your decision making)**
8. How often do you visit your child's school and for what reasons?
    a. Would you like to visit more, less?
    b. How do you feel when you enter the school?

9. How would you describe your relationship with the teachers at your children's school/s? Administrators/Principals? Staff?
10. Is there anyone in the school community you feel particularly close to? Can you talk more about that relationship OR (if not) why do you think that is the case?
    a. **How often do you interact with other parents from you children's school? How many do you know well?**
11. How much say/control do you feel like you have over how schools educate your child and the types of options available to you? If you had more say, what would you change?
    a. When you are unhappy with a school decision, or how things are working, who do you talk to about it?
    b. Do you feel welcomed to voice your opinions or concerns about your child's education to school and/or district staff and leaders? (Wilson, 2001)
    c. Have you ever tried to change something about the school your child/children attends? Describe that experience (please begin by describing the problem). **If not**, is there something you want to change? What is holding you back from trying to push for this change?
12. Can you talk about an experiences in which you participated in any programs, parents groups, or meetings (probe on board meetings) focused on your children's education?
    a. **How would you describe the impact of these/this group?**
    b. **Are there other ways you participate in your child's education?**
13. Does the school your child/children attends, or any of the schools located in this neighborhood, host events or programs for the local community? Do you participate in any of these events? Why/why not?
14. Is your child attending the school you most prefer? Explain.
    a. **In an ideal world, what kind of school would your child attend – what would the school/choice system look like?**
15. Is it important to you that the school community overlaps with your personal community?
    a. Do you believe that there should there be a strong sense of community around a school?
    b. How much is this the case for your child's/children's schools?
16. Can you describe some of the obstacles you faced during the school choice process? Were these obstacles related to certain school policies, application policies, school personnel, or other factors? Please explain. (Wilson, 2001)
    a. Are there ways that educators, district officials, or anyone else could have made your school choice process easier – have you made this known to them? (Wilson, 2001)

**PART III (Empowerment, Agency, Well-being)**

17. In what area of your life do you feel your opinions and voice are most valued/powerful?
18. Did you participate in the most recent school board elections? **If so**, what were you looking for in the candidates – how did you decide who to vote for? **If not**, talk a little bit about why you didn't. (possibly probe for other political participation)
19. The school system has changed quite a bit since 2005, how have these changes affected you?
    a. What concerns or fears do you have about the schools/school system in New Orleans?

    b. In general, how would you describe the school in New Orleans to a person thinking about moving here?
20. Overall, how satisfied are you with both your and your children's experience with school and the choice process in New Orleans? (press for details)
    a. How much do you feel the schools are set up to serve you and your needs?
21. What is your opinion about all of the RSD charter schools returning to the control of Orleans Parish School Board? Do you think the transition will this bring more power back to the community?
22. Is there anything else you think educators, district officials, or politicians should do to make school decision-making easier for parents? To improve the range of option you currently have?
23. Is there anything else you would like to comment on or discuss?

APPENDIX B

Board Member Protocol

1. So tell me a little bit about yourself, your personal history in New Orleans. What was your path to becoming involved in education in New Orleans?
2. What goals or priorities did you start out with as a board member just over two years ago and how have those changed?
3. I'd love it if you could talk to me a little bit about charter schools, how they are structured and run and how you view them as a means for delivering education (you are in the center of a very different type of school system)
4. The ed reforms in New Orleans have been in place for 14 years now. What about them most excites you? (ie greatest strengths)
    a. What worries you? What are the biggest weaknesses/failures/limitations?
5. As a school member, you are tasked with pushing the school system towards equity. What does that mean to you, how do define equity/what does equity look like?
    a. What systems/polices are currently working towards equity and what are the barriers?
6. You came on to the school board just as the unification process was getting underway. Can you describe why you think unification is important?
7. What is the board's role now that all the school are back under OPSB's umbrella?
    a. Do you sense a change in how the system is run now versus under the RSD?
8. What are two or three of the biggest challenges OPSB is facing back under the unified system?
9. What has gone really well? (ASK IF SEPARATE FROM EARLIER ANSWER)
10. How, overall, would you gauge parent and community trust in the education system?
11. In what ways do you think the system empowers families?
    a. Disempowers families?
12. As a follow up, can you talk a little bit about the board's role in both serving the community and ensuring there is community input in how schooling works in New Orleans?
13. Relatedly, because charters are removed from an attachment to a neighborhood, in your experience how are schools and CMOS's thinking about their role in the community (ie do they seem to feel like that have some responsibility to the community where the school is located, are they trying to build community among the parents who send their kids there)?
    a. Is this important to you and the school board? One of the largest criticism of school reform in New Orleans is that is "was done to the people not with them." Now that OPSB is back in control, are their plans to respond to this criticism? Do you have drivers that can motivate schools around this topic? Do you think the school board as the power to influence individual charter boards/leaders around this topic?
    b. Have you witnessed any great examples of a school cultivating a community either with its families, or in the neighborhood where it is located?
14. How would you characterize the stability of the system overall? I'm really interested in thinking about sustainability, from a systems level and from the human level (ie buy in) –

how would you assess the sustainability of this system? What are your concerns for the long term?

15. What advice do you have for cities considering this model, and/or all choice model?

# APPENDIX C

## Administrator Protocol

1. Let's start by talking a little bit about you. Why did you decide to be an educator?
2. Describe your educational and professional history and how that led to you where you are now.
3. What brought you to and keeps you in New Orleans?
4. Describe the your role in this school.
5. What have been the greatest successes? Challenges?
6. What are the ultimate goals of this schools and/or this model of education?
7. In this more transient education environment, how do you conceive of and define community?
8. Is community a priority, why and in which ways?
    a. If yes, how do you cultivate community policies, events, etc?
    b. What relationship you do want parents to have with the school?
9. How much say/voice to families have in what happens within the school?
10. What, if any, level of responsibility do you feel you have to the larger community either in this neighborhood or citywide?
11. What does equity look like to you? Is it achievable in this school, how would you know?
12. What about systemwide in New Orleans? What do you see working towards equity and what are the barriers?
13. How, overall, would you gauge parent and community trust in the education system?
14. How do you KNOW school are working. What are those indicators?
15. In its current iteration, in what ways do you think schools are having a positive and/or negative effects on community and equity.
16. Long term concerns?
17. Is the system sustainable?

APPENDIX D

Community Stakeholder Protocol

1. Tell me a little bit about your personal history in New Orleans.
2. You are involved in numerous community organizations, foundations, and nonprofits. What was your pathway into this work?
3. What drove you to become involved in education?
4. The ed reforms in New Orleans have been in place for 12 years now. What about them most excites you? (ie greatest strengths)
5. What worries you? What are the biggest weaknesses/failures/limitations?
6. In this more transient (non neighborhood based) education environment, what do you perceive is happening to community and community school relationships?
   **OR**
7. I'm also particularly interested in the relationship between communities and schools, how has that shifted/changed/played out now that there aren't neighborhood schools?
8. Do you perceive that among schools/CMOS/OPSB building community is a priority, why/not and in which ways?
9. Have you witnessed any great examples of a school cultivating a community either with its families, or in the neighborhood where it is located?
10. What does equity look like to you? System-wide in New Orleans, what do you see working towards equity and what are the barriers?
11. How, overall, would you gauge parent and community trust in the education system?
12. What would indicate to you that schools in New Orleans are working?
13. In what ways do you think the system empowers families?
14. Disempowers families?
15. I'm really interested in thinking about sustainability, from a systems level and from the human level (ie buy in) – how would you assess the sustainability of this system? What are your concerns for the long term?
16. What advice do you have for cities considering this model, and/or all choice model?

APPENDIX E

Codebook

| CODE | SUBCODE | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|---|
| *Descriptive Codes* | | |
| DESC-Role | - Parent<br>- School Leader<br>- School Board Member<br>- Community Stakeholder | Participant role |
| DESC-Gender | - Female<br>- Male | Participant gender |
| DESC-Race | - Black<br>- White<br>- Hispanic/Latinx<br>- Asian<br>- Other | Particpant race |
| DESC-Native | - New Orleans Native<br>- Non-Native | Participant from New Orleans or moved |
| DESC-Children | - 0<br>- 1<br>- 2<br>- 3<br>- 4 | Number of children |
| *Analytic Codes* | | |
| Well-being | - Stress<br>- Anxiety<br>- Satisfaction<br>- Race<br>- Burden<br>- Support | Sense of support vs. isolation, stress and anxiety vs. satisfaction, perception of capacity to navigate the system, perception of being valued vs. silenced or ignored |
| Agency | - Weak<br>- Strong<br>- Empowered<br>- Inclusion<br>- Control | Individual agency vs. agentic power, weak vs. strong empowerment, sense of control, inclusion |
| Trust | - OPSB<br>- RSD<br>- Transparency<br>- Enrollment | Perception of truthfulness, clarity around system operations, positive/negative interactions with institution representatives, sense of transparency |
| Mobility and Opportunity | - School Quality | Aspirations, match/mismatch |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | - System Quality<br>- Educational Desires | in aspirations and experience of school system, perception of attainable mobility, belief in educational philosophy |
| Equity | | Captures explicit responses to definition of equity, descriptions of equity, and assessments of equity |
| Information | | Types and use of information parents receive and use to navigate choice |
| Reunification | | Captures discussion around Act 91, the return of all schools to local control |
| Community | | Discussion of relationship between schools and communities, impact on community of reforms |
| Decision Making | - Safety<br>- Facilities<br>- Financial<br>- Geography<br>- Academic Achievement<br>- School Culture<br>- Social/Community<br>- Special Program<br>- Word of Mouth<br>- Transportation | Which factors parents consider when making decision about where to send their children to school, leave schools |

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